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Middle classes must face crunch

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Labour targets lazy parents

John Carroll
 Education Editor

THE Government yesterday began a drive to tackle social delinquency at its roots when David Blunkett, the Education and Employment Secretary, blamed the "intolerable behaviour" of lazy and ignorant parents for many of the problems of underachievement and indiscipline.

After spending eight months since the election trying to raise the performance of teachers and education authorities, he rounded on parents who neglected their responsibility to encourage homework and raise children's aspirations.

"Where there is a problem, it is all too often because parents claim not to have the time, because they have been disengaged from their children's education or because, quite simply, they lack even the basics of parenting skills," Mr Blunkett told a conference on parenting in Sheffield.

With such a lack of commitment, too often there is also a lack of expectation, [reinforcing] generations of disadvantage. Parents could no more plead poverty as an excuse than lack of time. While poverty early on in life makes a great difference to the opportunities available later on, it is the poverty of expectation and dedication which is the deciding factor," he said.

The Government has come forward with proposals in the Crime and Disorder Bill to impose curfews on children under 10 and powers for the courts to order parenting classes for mothers and fathers whose competence in controlling their children is in doubt.

problem exists not just for that family, but also for others whose children's education is disrupted by other children's poor behaviour, and indeed the wider community."

Education ministers would ask parents for "a commitment to help with their children's early learning, encourage good discipline and support regular homework". These responsibilities would be balanced by a new role for parents on governing bodies, in schools and on local education authorities.

Mr Blunkett's comments are the latest instalment in a whirlwind of activity since Christmas including proposals earlier this week to alter the curriculum in primary schools to focus on reading, writing and arithmetic. Mr Blunkett is convinced that lack of grounding in the three-Rs causes children to lose interest when they switch to secondary school and fall prey to a macho gang culture.

Tony Blair has asked his Downing Street social exclusion unit to produce an urgent report by Easter on tackling the problems of truancy. The unit was shocked by a report from Sir Paul Condon, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, that children between 10 and 14 were responsible for 40 per cent of street robberies and a third of car thefts and burglaries — mostly committed during school hours.

Mr Blunkett said: "It is many years since the issue of parenting has been at the top of the social agenda. The breakdown of the family unit, the underachievement of young men in education, the responsibility of parents for their children's behaviour and the impact of family attitudes towards educational achievement generally, have all been in the news recently."

"It is right therefore that politicians talk about the important role which parents have to play in education and the contribution which families have to make to social and economic policy," he said. "Our job is to determine the role of the individual and the family in carrying out their responsibility."

The Government's approach would be "tough and tender" to balance parents' rights and responsibilities. It would encourage the development of early excellence centres, offering integrated childcare and educational provision, mother and toddler groups, and training programmes to help develop parenting skills and share best practice.

The new voice of the opera: 'I don't want to sit next to somebody in a singlet, a pair of shorts and a smelly pair of trainers.'



All dressed up and somewhere to go: the audience at the Royal Opera House for the last performance before its closure for refurbishment



Sir Colin Southgate, the EMI chief and new chairman of the Royal Opera. He went to 12 performances last year. Did he pay for his tickets? No. 'There are some advantages to being the head of a record company. And you get better seats, with more leg room'

Sam Glashier
 Arts Correspondent

AS the Royal Opera House debuts go, it takes some beating. The beleaguered ROH's new chairman, the EMI chief Sir Colin Southgate, met the press last night for the first performance in his new role. But no sooner had the overture finished than he made the sort of gaffe for which the crisis-stricken opera house has become renowned.

Asked about the thorny problem of how to guarantee access to all sectors of society, Sir Colin said: "We mustn't downgrade the opera house. I don't want to sit next to somebody in a singlet, a pair of shorts and a smelly pair of trainers. I'm a relaxed individual but I am passionate about standards of behaviour."

Sir Colin was dressed in an open-necked white shirt, a check jacket, black trousers and black shoes. "Bums on seats, that's what it's about," he continued, "but we have to recognise that this is an expensive night out."

It was the operative equivalent of Stephen Norrle's strictures, when transport minister, that he did not see how you're going to enforce it. If people pay £180 for a ticket then they can wear what they want."

A spokesman for the Department of Culture, which put Sir Colin's name forward to the ROH board, said: "It just proves he's his own man."

Sir Colin, aged 59, also revealed he had visited the ROH a dozen times in the last year. But he had not paid. "EMI has corporate tickets," he said. "There are some advantages to being the head of a record company. And you get better seats, with more leg room."

One of the greatest causes of contention surrounding the opera house has been over the provision of tickets to corporate donors. Sir Colin added: "We have to take care of the corporate sector because they are the people paying for this."

Last year the ROH got a £15 million grant for the Royal Opera and the Royal Ballet, the largest subsidy to any arts institution. In July 1996 it received £78.5 million towards a £213 million redevelopment.

Tamworth two: one detained, one still on the run



Watching brief... one boar caught as the other escapes

Geoffrey Gibbs
 and Lucy Patton

DESPITE the combined efforts of police, members of the public and a huge pack of journalists, one of the Tamworth Two remained on the loose last night.

In scenes reminiscent of the OJ Simpson car chase, two escaped Ginger Tamworth boars were tracked by the police and media — on foot, by car and by helicopter.

And even after one of the daring duo was cornered, his fellow fugitive refused to give in and was last night reputed to be laying low in a safe sty, courtesy of a tabloid newspaper.

Journalists and photographers have outnumbered police in the remarkable search for the pigs which escaped slaughter last week. As locals helped police to comb the countryside for the animals, the buzz of an ITN helicopter was regularly heard in the sky above. The Daily Mail, which had despatched at least six journalists on the pigs' trail, appeared to have exclusively bought up one of the boars last night.

His days of freedom had seemed numbered as four police officers and an RSPCA inspector surrounded him at the bottom of a heavily wooded garden on the outskirts of the Wiltshire town of Malmesbury and worked out what to do next.

A crowd of around 60, mostly schoolchildren, climbed on the wall and fencing of the two-acre property. They were joined by about two dozen journalists and camera crews as they watched the darkened trees and bushes for the search team who were using powerful torches.

Shortly after 8pm the elusive boar made a break for it into a paddock at the rear of the garden and police admitted temporary defeat. After more than a week on the trot, the two young boars now face the prospect of spending the rest of their days in luxurious captivity after their owner succumbed to English sentimentality and a flood of offers to give them sanctuary and commuted their death sentence.

The drama began last Thursday when council road sweeper Arnoldo Dijulio was delivering three pigs to Newman's slaughterhouse in Malmesbury. Two made a sudden break for it. They wriggled through a hole beneath the perimeter fence and scampered in the direction of the swollen river Avon.

The boars, a naturally wild breed about the size of a large Labrador dog, have been spotted by local residents on a number of occasions. Local journalists claim to have heard Mr Dijulio turn down one offer of £15,000 for the pigs after they gripped the nation's imagination.

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Sketch

World domination?
Not today, thanks

Matthew Engel

TWO important political speeches were being made yesterday, one by the Prime Minister and one by Frank Field. Neither spoke in the House of Commons. The Commons is continuing to operate, however, at vast expense. And yesterday there were Treasury Questions, an opportunity for MPs to request information about the nation's finances. Or take a few more at the Paymaster General, Geoffrey Robinson (Coventry NW and points offshore).

Mr Robinson sat there apprehensively, like one of those sporting head teachers who agree to have wet sponges thrown at them at the school fête. For a full hour, he knew, he was going to have to endure.

Actually, it was only 59 minutes, because 30 seconds were lost to hysterical laughter when Virginia Bottomley accused the Government of being "authoritarian and bossy".

The rest of the time was wasted too. The Conservatives, faced with the indefensible, again proved themselves incapable of attacking. If they could have bided their time, and made him wonder what was coming, they might have exploited the unease about Mr Robinson's little arrangements that exists among Labour backbenchers. But that involves thought and planning, so was out of the question.

They were at him, predictably, from the moment the bell went. Question Two, from Mr Edward Garnier — "What is the Chancellor's policy on providing financial support to high-technology industry?" — turned out to be code for "How can we turn Robinson's embarrassment to our advantage?"

This enabled the Chancellor to get up and proclaim in a shocked voice that the Tories

cared nothing for high-technology industry. Anyway, Labour MPs said the Tories were hypocrites, the Tories said Labour were hypocrites, and Mr Robinson left without any further stains on his mud-spattered character.

Soon, I was getting more concerned about Sir Peter Tapsell (Conservative, Louth and Horncastle). Sir Peter has been in these parts since the 1950s and he is the last person in the House who looks as though he might have been an MP of the 1930s (excluding Alan Clark, who thinks he is an MP of the 1930s).

To be more exact, he looks like either the late Sir James Goldsmith, or a Bond villain intent on world domination, or possibly both. He never got to be even a junior minister for anything but he certainly seems — and if he gets the chance, sounds — like an Extremely Important Person. And yesterday he Wanted To Say Something.

Sir Peter put his glasses on. He took them off. He put them on again. He took them off. He rose to catch the Speaker's eye. He fell when he failed. He rose. He fell again.

Madam Speaker called a Tory sitting on one side of him, who cannot have been born when Sir Peter was first here. She even called a Labour MP called Ms Smith from Redditch who was wearing a not dissimilar pinstriped trouser suit to Sir Peter, but probably £1,000 cheaper.

Sir Peter turned to Mrs Bottomley, seated the other side of him, and shrugged, as if to protest against the absurdity of it all. Then Mrs Bottomley got called — to such devastating backfiring effect. Sir Peter departed.

The really big parliamentary news was that Peter Mandelson is henceforth to answer questions for 10 minutes every blue moon rather than five.

Nicholas Soames said: "We in the House are very grateful for the opportunity for an exhaustive 10-minute internal and external investigation of the Minister without Portfolio's affairs." The way the Tory Party is at present, the Rt Hon. Saddam Hussein could answer questions on human rights for a fortnight and they still wouldn't embarrass him for a second.

Review

Familiarity never
taken for granted

Andrew Clements

London Symphony Orchestra/
Bernard Haitink
Barbican

HIS peers may have come and gone, but Bernard Haitink has been the most steadfast of the great conductors who have appeared regularly in London over the last two decades.

First with the London Philharmonic, and then as music director at Covent Garden, he has consistently offered performances of the highest possible class, and the sheer familiarity of them has sometimes led to his qualities being taken for granted.

Yet this week, appearing for the first time with the London Symphony Orchestra, Haitink demonstrated his immense qualities once again. His readings have never stood still, whether in the concert hall or opera house, they have continued to develop, always gaining in perception and digging ever deeper into the scores.

In his two London Symphony programmes, the main works were symphonies that have been staples of his repertoire — Bruckner's Seventh and Mahler's First.

Both in their different ways were massively commanding performances. The orchestra sounded a very different animal under Haitink from when playing with its principal conductor Colin Davis. Not better, just different — a sleeker, more refined string sound with a fresh bloom upon the tone, woodwind sharply etched against the textures, brass integrated rather than left to stand in relief.

For Haitink now investigates colour and instrumental layering as comprehensively as he has always dealt with large-scale scale form. In the Bruckner he teases out the scoring in a revelatory way, just as he is able to invest each musical paragraph with wonderful inner life, using the tiniest variations of pace and emphasis without losing sight of the rhetorical goals that articulate its progress.

And while the Mahler constantly showed the same textural and structural awareness, it was the way in which every theme was instantly and indelibly characterised that caught the ear.

The works that preceded the symphonies in both concerts were equally involving, equally fresh-minded. There was Haydn's Symphony No 86 before the Bruckner, full of wit and lyric grace, a model of the way in which a classical symphony played by a modern orchestra can still hold its own against a performance on period instruments.

Mahler's First was knowingly paired with his Lieder Elise, Fäulden Gärten, the song cycle that furnished themes to the symphony; the soloist was Anne Sofie von Otter, sounding just a shade tired and strained in her tone, but still handling every phrase with perfect poise and assurance.

Meanwhile, Haitink was working a series of small wonders in the accompaniments, none more spellbinding than at the end of the very last song, which looked forward a quarter of a century to the world of Mahler's final works.

This review appeared in later editions yesterday.

In The Week tomorrow

Torn to shreds

Why Natalie Imbruglia is in trouble over pop plagiarism

Maggie, Maggie, Maggie

Is she really the heroine of the new feminism?

Plus Jeremy Hardy

'Does anyone believe that a system costing £100 billion a year, while poverty is rising, can and must be modernised? The answer is plainly Yes. Or that a system that often makes you better off by sitting at home than going to work should be continued? Plainly No.'

Tony Blair, launching welfare campaign.



Tony Blair speaks to a selected Labour Party audience at Dudley town hall on the first date of his campaign

PHOTOGRAPH: PAUL HACKETT

Blair's mission to reassure

Prime Minister takes to the road to convince sceptics that social justice is at heart of reforms

Michael White
Political Editor

PENSION reform could take 15 years before it makes an impact, Tony Blair reassured older voters last night as he set out on his campaign for root-and-branch reform of the welfare state.

In a combative defence of his campaign, he swept aside scare stories that a Labour government would make the poor worse off or toss people out of their wheelchairs as one exasperated Downing Street spokesman put it in the face of public scepticism, echoed yesterday by the Tory leader, William Hague.

Far from betraying the party's core principles of social justice and solidarity, Mr Blair said, his aim was to make them live, breathe and work again — instead of letting the welfare state become a dead end for an underclass. "shut out from society's mainstream."

But the prime minister — speaking in Dudley town hall, where he launched his 1995 drive to re-write Clause 4 — also posed the core question: "Does anyone believe that a system costing £100 billion a year, while poverty is rising, can and must be modernised? The answer is plainly Yes. Or that a system that often makes you better off by sitting at home than going to

work should be continued? Plainly No."

Mr Blair's first "welfare roadshow" appearance before a selected Labour audience came as the government propaganda machine moved to highlight costly anomalies and Frank Field, strategic guru in Harriet Harman's Department of Social Security, called for renewed partnership between public and private sectors to replace "the ration book approach to welfare."

In more outspoken terms

The message was: welfare should be about prevention of poverty, preferably via work

than his leader. Mr Field declared that a central aim of New Labour reform was individual responsibility — to restore the Victorian link between welfare and self-improvement which the 1949 welfare state eroded.

But their underlying message was similar: that welfare should be about the prevention of poverty, preferably via work.

"The state pension will remain the foundation for security in retirement," Mr Blair said, before repeating

his pledge to protect all those in genuine need.

He went on: "Changes often take years to come into effect. In the case of pension reform it could be 15 years from now that the results will be seen."

With senior ministers divided on the detail, Mr Blair will chair a cabinet committee dominated by modernisers that includes Gordon Brown, Ms Harman and Mr Field, Frank Dobson, David Blunkett and the housing minister, Hillary Armstrong.

John Prescott will join it when current commitments permit. Yesterday Ms Harman issued seven "welfare reform focus files" setting out the case for change and highlighting both fraud and what ministers see as misdirected spending.

"We have no choice but to reform the system," she said as veteran Labour ex-ministers like Lord "Al" Morris demanded a moratorium on cuts in disability benefits awarded for life, pending the full review.

The Liberal Democrats promised support for sensible and practical reforms which were not cuts-driven or harsh on the poorest. So did Mr Hague, whose party record Mr Blair mocked in Dudley.

For his part, the Tory leader likened Mr Blair's campaign to the US war in Vietnam. He told a Westminster press gallery audience:

"This is a noble cause but as with Vietnam there are not some why they are there, they don't know how to bring to an end what they are opposed to, they don't know what victory is."

Leader comment, page 12; Decca Atkinson, page 13

Attitudes to child care, not cash, 'determines whether lone parents choose to seek work'

Mark Atkinson
Economics Correspondent

LABOUR'S welfare-to-work strategy for lone parents is challenged today by research showing that most lone mothers stay at home because they believe it makes them a good parent, not because they are better off on benefits.

The research shows single mothers carefully weigh up their options and place financial considerations well down their list of priorities.

Far more important are social and moral definitions of what constitutes good mothering.

The research — by Simon Duncan of the University of Bradford and Rosalind Edwards of South Bank University, London — suggests that the Government's efforts to increase incentives for lone mothers to work by cutting benefit levels for new claimants and providing more formal

childcare facilities may be fundamentally misconceived.

"A blanket policy of encouraging all lone mothers to work, irrespective of their beliefs, may actually do more harm than good in some cases," said Mr Duncan.

The research, which will form the basis of a book to be published later this year, is based on the 1991 census and in depth interviews with about 90 lone mothers.

It finds that sort of job skills they have and the wages they can command are important factors, as are public policy constraints such as tax, benefits and the supply of childcare.

But the primary factors explaining lone mothers' uptake of paid work are "non-market, collective relations and understandings about motherhood" — in other words, the mother's own beliefs about what is right for her and her children.

These beliefs vary across

social and ethnic groups. For example, Afro-Caribbean women of all classes tend to see financial provision through paid employment as a major part of their mothering responsibilities. The ratio of working lone mothers from these communities is therefore disproportionately high.

But white working class and middle class women tend to hold the view that they have a duty to stay at home — therefore the proportion working is relatively low.

Mr Duncan and Ms Edwards say their research shows that welfare-to-work is based on erroneous ideas about what motivates lone mothers.

"It's not about cost/benefit analysis," Ms Edwards said. "It's about what's right for them as mothers. Conceptions of work differ between social and ethnic groups so you cannot have a uniform, national policy that encourages lone mothers to work."

Ms Edwards said that what was needed was a "bottom up" approach which took into account local labour markets and the local social and ethnic attitudes.

Disabled golfer sues
PGA for 'right to ride'

Mark Tran in New York

A PROFESSIONAL American golfer who is afflicted with a rare ailment that makes it painful to walk is making legal history by suing the Professional Golf Association so he can use a golf cart in tournaments.

Casey Martin suffers from Klippel Tremmayer Weber syndrome, an unusual birth defect that reduces blood flow in his right leg, hampering his ability to walk. He was active in sports as a youth, but can no longer run, swim or ride a bicycle. Martin, who last walked 18 holes in July, wears a stocking on his right leg to reduce the swelling, but the deterioration of the shin-bone makes it susceptible to fracture. Should that happen, amputation might be necessary.

He has sued the PGA to be allowed to use a golf cart in tournaments, becoming the first athlete to invoke the Americans With Disabilities Act to play competitive sports.

The act is the most extensive civil rights legislation since the Civil Rights Act of 1964. "Without a cart I can't imagine playing much longer," said Martin, who captained the Stanford University golf team which included the American golfing sensation Tiger Woods. Woods remembers his friend



Casey Martin: 'I can't play much longer without a cart'

as being able to walk 36 holes a day in "a lot of pain", three years ago. He believes physically handicapped players should be allowed to ride.

But Martin's ailment is getting worse and, even if he wins his case, he might not be able to play much longer. Eight years ago, X-rays of his right leg were clear; now his X-rays are dark with the pools of blood that create the swelling.

The PGA and golf purists like Arnold Palmer are adamant about keeping the no-cart rule, although players in the Senior PGA tour are allowed to ride carts.

"Endurance is part of our sport. Walking has been an integral part of the competition on all tours and has been uniformly recognized as an integral part of the competition by all the major bodies in golf for a long, long time," said Tom Finchem, the US tour commissioner. The PGA also asserts it is a private entity and is not subject to the provisions of the disability act, under a clause that specifically exempts "private clubs or establishments".

Martin won the first round of his legal battle when a federal magistrate in Eugene, Oregon, his home town, issued a preliminary ruling ordering the PGA to provide him with a cart in tournaments.

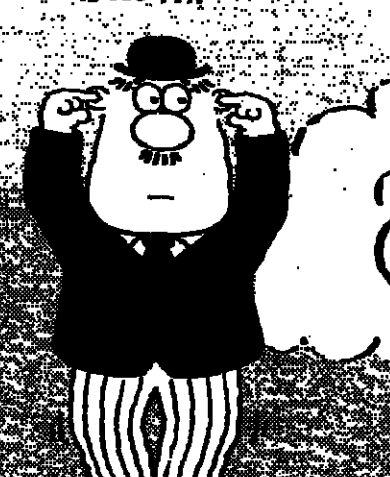
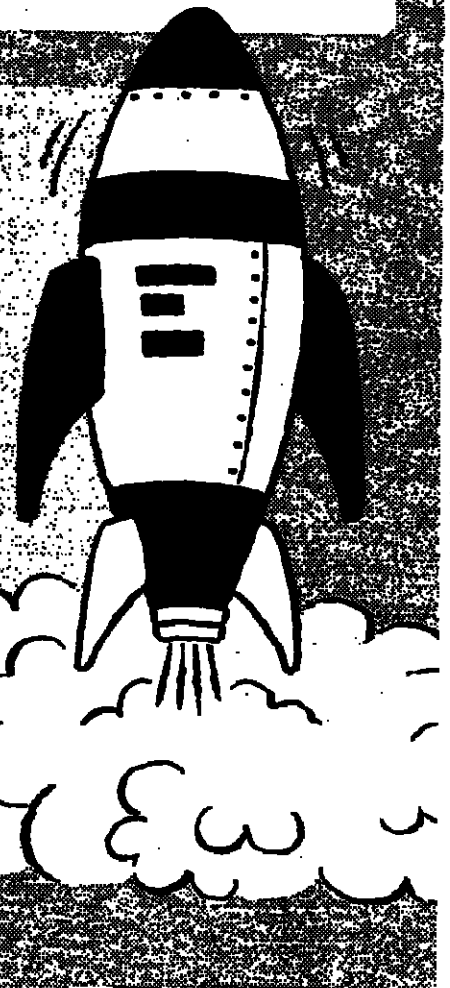
"The balance of hardship tips overwhelmingly in favour of the plaintiff and any hardship to the defendant is de minimus," said the magistrate, Thomas Coffin. The lawsuit proper is scheduled to start on February 2.

"He is a worker. He is making a living. He is not asking for pity or charity. He wants an equal opportunity to hit the ball," said Stephen Gold of the Public Interest Law Centre of Philadelphia.

Martin's golfing ability is not in doubt. He won a tournament last Sunday and is now taking part in a tournament in Florida.

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Revenue

Judge relaxes formality at Old Bailey for victim and her four classmates accused of lunch break sex attack at primary school

Boys, 10, 'raped girl in lavatories'



Mrs Justice Bracewell at the Old Bailey trial yesterday of four boys accused of sex attack at school. SKETCH: JUAN QUENZLER

Duncan Campbell
Crime Correspondent

THE JUDGE and the barristers removed their wigs, the defendants sat with their parents in the well of the court and the clerk addressed them by their first names and told them their court papers would each be marked with different coloured crayons. The aim was to create a "relaxed atmosphere" in Court 12 of the Old Bailey.

The reason for the change in court practices was the age of the four defendants and the chief prosecution witness: two of those accused of rape and one of those charged with indecent assault are aged 10 — the youngest ever to stand trial for rape — as is their alleged victim. The oldest defendant, also accused of indecent assault, is 11. All four are pleading not guilty.

The boys are accused of forcing their classmate into the boys' lavatories at a west London primary school and, while one acted as look-out, taking her clothes off and assaulting her. Two are alleged to have raped her. A fifth boy said to have taken part in the attack was not charged because, at nine, he was under the age of criminal responsibility.

The trial judge, Mrs Justice Bracewell, explained to the jury that the trial would be as informal as possible. There would be frequent breaks so that the children did not lose concentration and the girl, who started her evidence yesterday, would speak via a video link.

The prosecuting counsel, Mark Dennis, told the jury that the girl and the boys had known each other and played together for some time. One of the boys was related to the girl.

On May 6 last year, during the morning break, the girl had come out of the girls' lavatories where some of her friends were pretending to be Spice Girls. Three of the boys had stopped her, one of them saying "not so fast" and had pushed her against the wall and made grunting noises, said Mr Dennis.

Record-breaking contract for top hospital drama

ER extracts pound of flesh with deal at £8m an episode

Joanna Coles in New York

AMERICA'S most popular television drama series, ER — which focuses on a group of attractive young doctors wrestling with casualty patients at a Chicago hospital — made broadcasting history yesterday when NBC television agreed to pay the show's producers a record \$7.9 million per episode.

The amount dwarfs the previous record of \$3 million per episode paid by NBC for the sit-com Seinfeld.



With the impending loss of comedian Jerry Seinfeld's show, NBC television took emergency action to retain ER, above, and its 30 million audience

The deal, which flabbergasted United States television executives, guarantees the channel will keep ER, which is shown in Britain on Channel 4, for the next three years, and means NBC will pay more than \$515 million for 66 new episodes. The cast will be locked in for the next two years, except for George Clooney who plays the heartthrob paediatrician Dr Doug Ross. He has only signed up for one more series.

The mega-deal came less than 24 hours after the National Football League announced the most expensive television deal in history. Spread over eight years, CBS, ABC and Fox will pay an estimated £10.7 billion for the exclusive rights to show various US football games.

Reflecting the same problems now facing the BBC and ITV, both deals illustrate the frustration of the main networks as they lose viewers to cable channels. In such a competitive market, major sporting events or dramas such as ER, Seinfeld, Chicago Hope, Friends, and Frasier, can name their price with the networks.

Their value lies in the huge sums the channels can charge for advertising. ER and Seinfeld, which both attract about 30 million viewers, are particularly attractive to advertisers because they appeal to both men and women aged between 18 and 49, with significant disposable incomes.

ER, created by the writer Michael Crichton and shown weekly at 10pm, is a crucial component of NBC's Thursday night schedule, which has been the most-watched night of television for three years.



Anthony Edwards (Dr Mark Greene) £76,700



Noah Wyle (Dr John Carter) £61,500



Julianna Margulies (Nurse Carol Hathaway) £61,500



George Clooney (Dr Doug Ross) £92,000



Eriq La Salle (Dr Peter Benton) £61,500

Paying for the expensive logic of 'must-have' TV programmes

Kamal Ahmed
Media Correspondent

IT SOUNDS astonishing. More than \$8 million for just under an hour's television — or more than 15 times the amount it would cost to produce an hour of high quality drama, even if it starred David Jason, Helen Mirren and Robert Carlyle.

Yet what sounds like economic madness actually makes good television sense for NBC. So much so, in fact, that telephone number deals are making their way to this side of the Atlantic as well.

NBC is in the business of buying audience bankers, and by buying them ensuring high advertising revenues. For each ER programme, watched by 30 million people in America, the advertising brings in close on £10 million.

Similarly, the growing power of BSkyB in Britain, is ratcheting up costs here. Sky knows that to increase audience share it has to have what programme buyers describe as "must-have" television.

Hence, the £270 million deal the company signed to televise the Premier League and the £287 million deal the company signed to buy up England's home matches during the Five Nations rugby tournament.

And hence, the recent announcement that, for \$2 million, Sky had bought the television rights to the four hottest comedy properties from America — ER, along with Friends, Veronica's Closet and Suddenly Susan.

In the confusing world of television programme buying, Channel 4, which reinvigorated the American market with success stories such as Cheers and Roseanne, has also bought the rights to ER and Friends — for which it is thought to have paid \$80 million for a deal lasting until the millennium.

Because the channel only paid for the terrestrial rights, Sky was able to nip in and tie-up the satellite deal.

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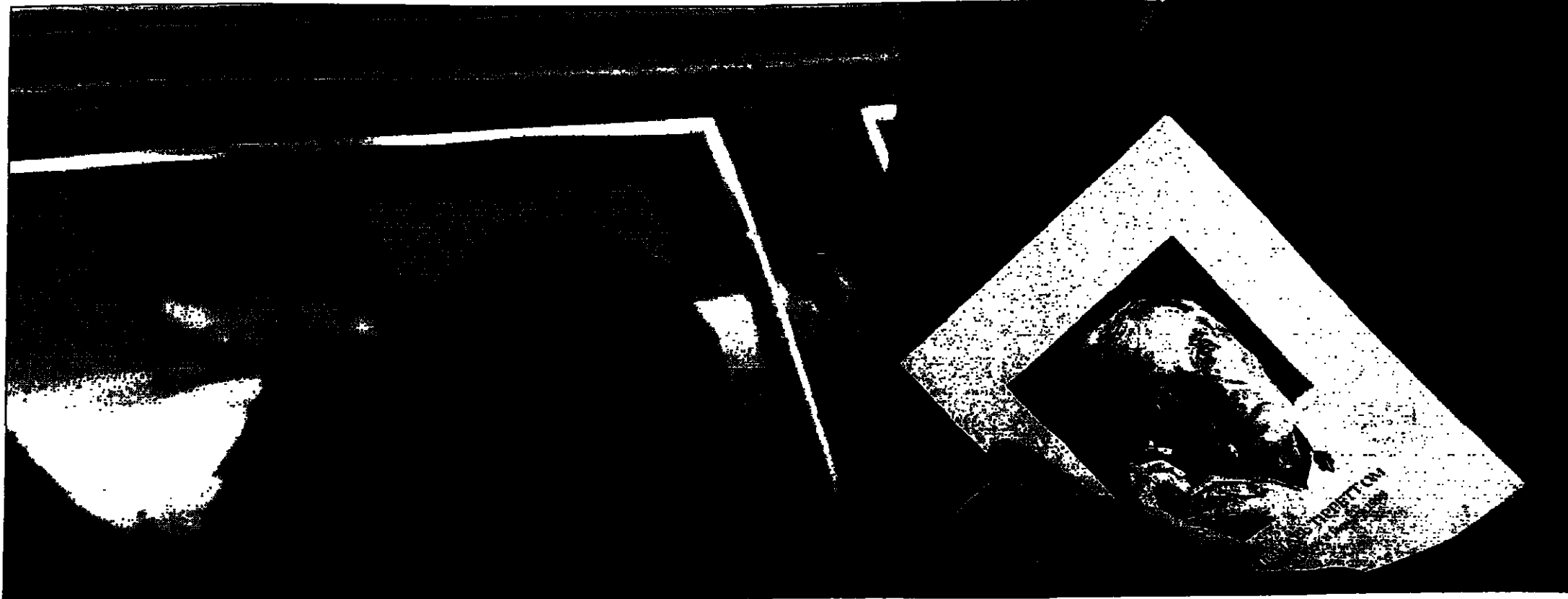
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Funeral salute to Tippett the man and his music

All things fall and are built again
And those that build them again are gay
(W B Yeats: Lapis Lazuli)

THOSE words were the final lines of Sir Michael Tippett's opera *The Midsummer Marriage*, writes Dan Glazier. The poem was read in full at the composer's funeral service yesterday, following his death last week aged 93. In keeping with Sir Michael's maverick spirit, the ceremony strayed from the usual formula for such occasions.

There were no grand pronouncements from the pulpit about what a wonderful person he was, no inappropriate readings from religious texts, no cloying hymns. Instead the 300



A mourner holding the order of service during the funeral of composer Sir Michael Tippett, described by his manager as a man who 'cared for the music and the people, not the pomp'

PHOTOGRAPH: MARTIN GOWEN

members of the musical establishment and anti-establishment in Hanworth crematorium, west London, heard Sir Michael's own spiky music: two movements from his String Quartet No 3 performed by the Kreutzer Ensemble and a piece from *The Blue Guitar*

performed by Garry Ryan. There was also a movement from a Beethoven string quartet and poetry read by actors Zoe Wanamaker and Alec McCowen.

"Michael would have hated a conventional remembrance service," said his manager Melion

Bowen. "He hated being put on a pedestal. He cared for the music and the people, not for the pomp."

In the introduction to the service, Mr Bowen wrote: "In accordance with Michael Tippett's stated wishes, there will be no hymns or prayers or other

religious ceremonies enacted at his funeral. Michael also made it clear that this and any other subsequent memorial occasion should not be held in a church or other place of religious worship."

The service was by turns sombre and upbeat, start-

ing with the melancholy second movement from Sir Michael's Third String Quartet, and ending with the third movement from the same quartet.

Zoe Wanamaker, whose father Sam directed the first performance of Tippett's opera *King Priam* and the

première of *The Ice Break* at the Royal Opera House, said: "He was a funny, warm and sentimental man. And he was eccentric, going to the Palace shortly before his death in how tie and brightly coloured pinstripes. His music could be wonderfully joyous."

Nicholas Payne, director of the Royal Opera, paid tribute to *The Midsummer Marriage*. "It had a terrific effect on audiences. It had a fantastic sort of life force, with so many ideas and such energy. That seems to me quintessential Michael Tippett."

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Diana trust defends fee of £500,000

David Pallister

THE trustees of the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund yesterday dismissed reports that they had been overcharged by their legal advisers, the London solicitors Mishcon de Reya, which is seeking £500,000 for 11 weeks' work.

The firm, whose senior litigation partner, Anthony Julius, is the unpaid chairman of the trustees, also defended its charges, claiming that they had been discounted at 20 per cent.

In a statement, the trustees said they were "very satisfied" with Mishcon de Reya's work and that the fees were "if anything on the low side".

Mr Julius rejected suggestions that he had a conflict of interest. He said he always left the room when the firm's invoices came up on the agenda.

The reports suggested that some of the four other partners working on the fund charged up to £250 an hour. But legal sources said yesterday that senior partners in big London firms routinely charged that amount.

One trustee, the writer and broadcaster Vivienne Parry, said: "The financial benefits from the commercial projects being established by Mishcon de Reya will massively outweigh the costs of setting them up. Of course we will keep an eye on the fees, but

we can't do something as big and complex as the memorial fund without the best legal advice."

She said the trustees were "as one" in their confidence in the firm's handling of issues such as clearing copyright for the multi-million selling Diana Tribute Album and issuing licences for Diana memorabilia. "If you are doing something like this, you have to do it properly. You can't expect to pop into a local high street solicitors and ask them to do international copyright law, without which the Diana Tribute Album would never have come out. Furthermore, they have thrown resources at this and haven't charged us for half of it."

Confirming the £500,000 figure, the firm's statement said the money was for the cost of legal transactions and the 20 per cent discount was equivalent to its normal profit margin. A further 15 assistants were working on the fund's affairs, assessing more than 1,500 projects and helping to establish rights to Diana's name and image around the world.

John Jackson, the firm's chairman, said: "We are satisfied that our fees are charged in a proper way and at a proper quantum."

The fund has raised about £35 million, most from sales of Elton John's *Candle in the Wind '97* which has become the biggest selling single with sales of 33 million.

London invites US gays to tea in play for pink dollar

Stuart Miller

LONDON is to take on the gay tourist mecca of San Francisco and South Beach, Florida, in an attempt to lure the pink dollar.

Thousands of American gays and lesbians will be targeted with a publicity campaign, to be launched today, which portrays London as a tolerant city with a vibrant artistic and cultural life.

The London Tourist Board campaign, aimed at affluent professionals aged 30-50, is backed by Chris Smith, the Culture Secretary. He is due to address the International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association conference at a London hotel this weekend.

The campaign will start with a mail shot to 50,000 gay Americans showing Big Ben beside the slogan "if you think South Beach is the only place for tea, think again." In US gay slang, "tea" refers to tea dances where homosexuals can meet.

British Airways and the British Tourist Authority in New York are supporting the £50,000 campaign.

Helen Jones, the tourist board's head of business development, said the gay market was already worth £1 billion a year for London. "We are aiming to build upon this. Many of the things that London does best — the arts, theatre and restaurants — have been both inspired and supported by the gay community for many years."

Vaccine hope after study of virus in cervix cancer

Chris Mihill
Medical Correspondent

A FINDING that helps to explain why some women with a virus linked to cervical cancer go on to develop the disease while others do not could lead to better vaccines against the cancer, researchers say today.

Doctors have known for some time that a wart virus, HPV, plays a role in triggering the cancer. Now scientists from the Cancer Research Campaign, based at the Paterson Institute, Manchester, have shown how one strain of the virus, HPV16, can escape the body's defence system.

Molecules called HLAs, present on all cells, alert the immune system to the presence of a virus. There are different types of HLAs, in the same way as there are different blood groups.

The research, published in the *Lancet*, shows that women with an HLA called B*4 seem protected against the virus, while in those without it the "alarm system" is not triggered and the body fails to mount a defence.

Gordon McVie, the CRC's director general, said the research "could help in the design of cervical cancer vaccines which boost the immune system's ability to recognise and fight HPV."

"It may also have implications for treatment of other cancers, because a third of all tumours, particularly prostate cancer, show altered HLAs."

كلمة من القرآن

Inquiry into killing of 'unarmed' victim

Police shoot man dead in raid

Sarah Boseley

ARMSD police hunting an attempted murder suspect shot dead one of his friends yesterday in a raid on a flat near Hastings on the south coast.

James Ashley, aged 30, who died after four officers from the Special Operations Unit burst into his bedroom at 4am, is believed to have been unarmed. A spokeswoman for Sussex police said "We are not saying any firearm was seen on the man."

He was shot once in the chest and died at the scene, in spite of receiving immediate first aid.

An inquiry was announced to be headed by Barbara Wilding, an assistant chief constable from Kent, and supervised by the Police Complaints Authority. The authority's deputy chairman, John Cartwright, said the results of the inquiry would be passed to the Crown Prosecution Service and the inquest. "The independent investigation will determine exactly what happened and will look at all the circumstances surrounding the tragedy," he said.

No officer has been suspended. The chief constable of Sussex police, Paul Whitehouse, said: "Of course we deeply regret that a man has died in this incident. However, in the light of all the information available to me at this time, I am satisfied that the operation was properly

and professionally planned, that the use of firearms was justified, and that my officers acted properly, with due regard to everybody's safety."

Thirty officers were involved in the raid on a two-storey flat above a social club in a rundown side street of St Leonards, once the most affluent suburb of Hastings, but which is now in deep decline.

The flat, above the members-only Club M, was occupied by four men — believed to be from Liverpool and involved in drug dealing — and one woman. The police had a search warrant relating to drugs and firearms. Their prime target, however, a man wanted for attempted murder, was not in the flat and is still at large. Three men were arrested and the woman is believed to have been treated for shock.

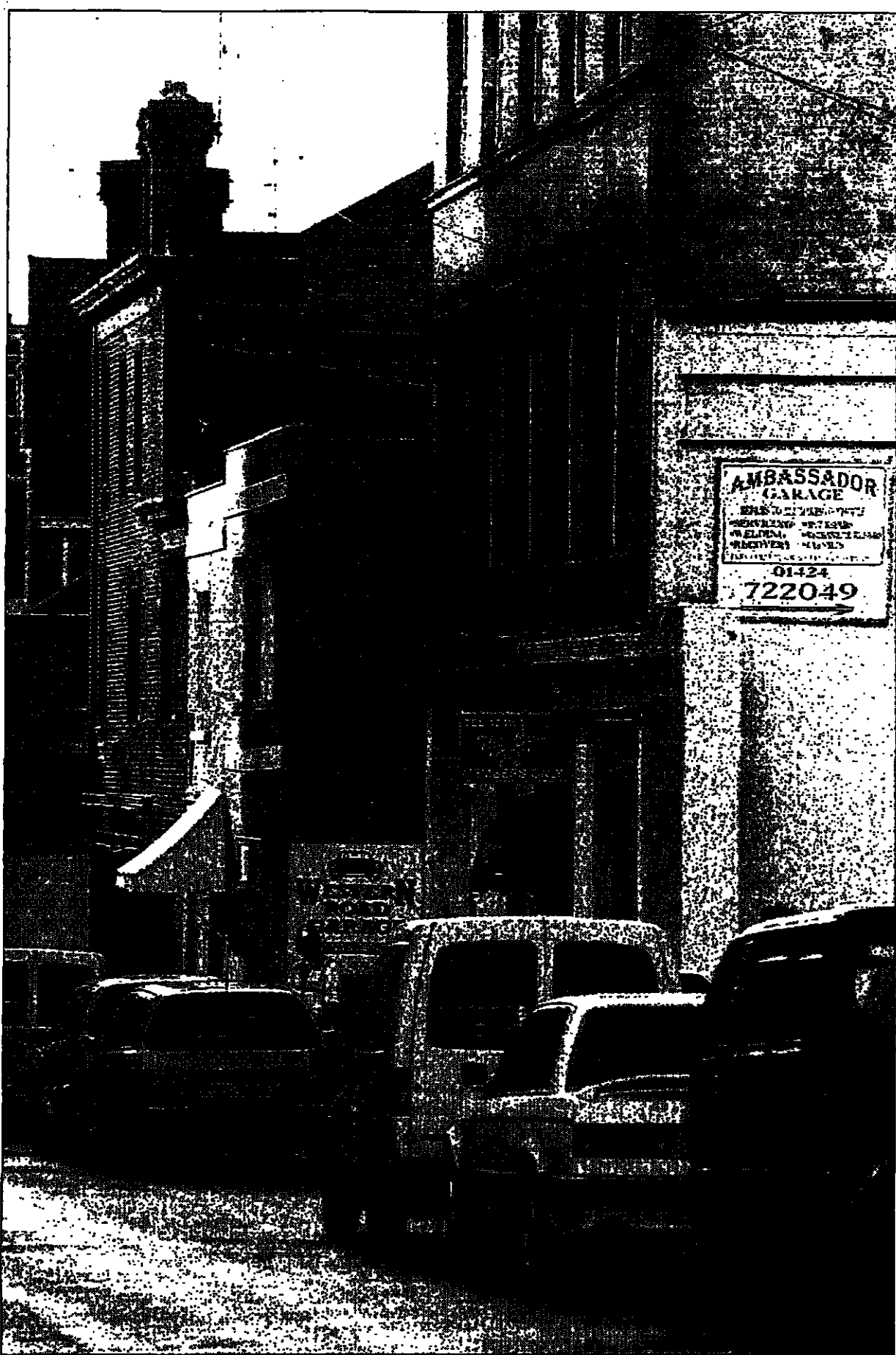
St Leonards residents who had met Mr Ashley were yesterday torn between applauding the police for their tough action against a nest of suspected drug gangsters, and regretting the death of Mr Ashley, perceived as the gang's least offensive member.

The attempted murder inquiry relates to a stabbing on Wednesday last week. A regular at The Cherries seaside pub went to fetch something from a friend's car. A man followed him, produced a knife, and stabbed him in the groin. The attacker was pulled off by Mr Ashley, probably saving the victim's life.

Like many a seaside town, St Leonards, in East Sussex, struggles with drugs, crime and unemployment in the bleak winter months. The Cherries pub was raided by armed police in December, but only a small amount of drugs was found. One man was cautioned. The Cherries' new landlord is fighting to restore its image as a family pub.

A message in an anti-drugs booklet handed out to customers by one of the regulars declared: "Avoid all needle drugs. The only dope worth shooting is the dealer who sold to you!"

Magnificent seaside villas from the last century and well



The flat, above Club M, where armed police shot dead James Ashley in a raid early yesterday

PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFF RAYNER

care-for gardens and mansions around the former home of the author Sir Henry Rider Haggard reflect St Leonards' past glories, but there are areas of real decay. Western Road, where the raid took place, is only yards from the sea, but ends in a derelict Victorian hotel with gaping windows and demolition work all around.

Edwina Buters, who works around the corner in Mary's

Food Market, said she moved to Bexhill "so I could go out for a walk".

She was not shocked at the shooting. "Stabbings and murders are happening all the time. Nothing's right with this town. Everyone is frightened to go out of the door. Things have got out of control." The shop now delivers groceries to elderly people frightened to leave their homes, she said.

'Martian' life came from Earth

Tim Radford
Science Editor

IT WAS NOT the Martians after all. Tiny traces of life detected in a meteorite in Antarctica shook the world in 1996. They predicated one of the great space adventures of 1997. They were evidence of life on Mars, said a team of NASA-funded scientists.

Not so, scientists from Arizona and California will report today. The meteorite found in the Allan Hills of Antarctica is indeed from Mars. And yes, it does contain evidence of organic material. But the tiny traces of amino acids and organic carbon are from planet Earth.

"They are clearly terrestrial and they look similar to amino acids we see in the sur-

rounding Antarctic ice," said Jeff Bada, a marine chemist from the Scripps Institution of Oceanography. "How they got there is still an open issue."

It was the second blow for Nasa. In December, a group of scientists looked at different evidence within the same meteorite — evidence hailed in 1996 as fossilised bacteria dating from a distant era of life on Mars and pronounced the "fossils" as little accidents of geology.

The August 1996 announcement of life on Mars shook the world. It coincided with a readiness within science to believe in the possibility of life on other planets, a belief bolstered by the discovery of microbial life in "impossible" places on earth: in salt lakes, in acid pits, down volcanoes,

deep in boiling ocean geysers and at huge pressures in ancient rocks, miles below the surface.

Months before the discovery, biologists speculated that Mars might once have had a watery surface, and life in the waters.

The Allan Hills meteorite is one of a group known to have been knocked off Mars in some ancient collision, and preserved in the seeming purity of Antarctica. Many experts had peered at rocks from Mars but only one team saw traces of Martian life.

When they did so, cynics pointed to an interesting coincidence — that Nasa was at the time discussing its funding problems with the United States administration. It was also about to embark on a series of explorations of the

Red Planet, the first of which began with a dramatic touchdown of a little robot rover on July 4, 1997.

But since then, the doubters have had their day. One by one teams in Europe and the US have looked again at the meteorite and shaken their heads sadly.

The latest pronouncement does not mean the end of the dream. In 2005, a space probe will go to Mars and bring back samples from the surface. In the meantime, Prof Bada has left open the tiniest crack in the door for hope.

"There is no evidence in our hands that the meteorite contains any components that we could definitely trace to Mars," he said, "except maybe some tiny mysterious component that we don't understand at this point."

Aesop's fabled tales are revived to rude health

John Ezard

YET ANOTHER children's classic is to be exposed as a sewer of sex, brutality and homophobia — even if the scandal has been an open secret for 8,000 years.

A Penguin edition of Aesop's Fables published this month will include the treasure house of morally improving stories of animals that Victorians taught their children, but it will also have a few other stories that would have horrified them.

Along with The Hare and the Tortoise and The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing, there is The Camel who Shat in the River, the moral of which is that excrement flows downstream. Most dubious of all is Zeus and Shame. "When Zeus fashioned man, he forgot about shame. Not knowing how to

introduce her, he ordered her to enter through the rectum."

"Shame bawled at this and was indignant. Finally she said: 'All right I'll go in — but on condition Eros doesn't come in the same way. If he does, I leave immediately.'"

"Ever since then, all homo-sexuals are without shame." The moral? "Those who are prey to love lose all shame." The edition's editors, Robert and Olivia Temple, say that 100 of the 350 tales were cut, either by prudish or because they were repetitive. They were able to find them in a Paris university edition from 1927, but they also survived in other translations since the sixth century BC.

Yesterday Mr Temple said it was time to do away with the "sanitising" of the Victorians. "Aesop had a wonderful sense of humour — and we're all big boys now."

Light-sensitive knees offer hope of treatment for jet lag

Tim Radford
Science Editor

DAZED jetsetters at last know why they feel weak at the knees: US scientists have found light-detecting equipment there.

Scott Campbell and Patricia Murphy, from Cornell University, are experts in circadian rhythms, the daily natural cycles that make flowers open in daylight and leaves curl up at night. They report in Science today that they have found "extraocular circadian phototransduction" in humans in the popliteal region — the back of the knees.

If you shine a light there, you can reset the body clock. This could turn into a treatment for jetlag.

Until now it had been assumed that the human body clock would reset itself on the evidence of the eyes. Now, it seems, the knees have it.

The two scientists tested their theory on 15 healthy people, adjusting their body clocks in laboratory conditions. They shone "timed" bright light exposure directly behind the knees. When they shone a light before a certain point in the circadian cycle, this delayed it. When they did the same thing after that point, they advanced it. "Timed bright light exposure," the scientists say, "is an effective treatment for sleep and circadian rhythm disorders including jetlag." Now that they know how to change the human clock by beaming at the back of the knees, they add, it could be even more effective.

News in brief

Seven IRA prisoners cross to Ireland

SEVEN long-serving IRA prisoners were transferred from Britain to jail in Ireland yesterday in an attempt to enhance the Northern Ireland peace process.

The group, which included five men sentenced last year to 35 years each for mainland terror crimes, was flown to Dublin in a chartered jet before being driven to Portlaoise prison.

The five — former US marine John Crowley, Gerard Hanratty and Francis Rafferty, of Belfast, Donal Gannon, of Dublin, and Robert Morrow, of Dundalk — were convicted of conspiring to bomb power stations. The others were Dubliner Liam O'Duibhir and Peter Sherry, of Dungannon. Dublin views the transfers as confidence building. Around 12 IRA members are now left in British prisons.

Labour agent charged

LABOUR's efforts to restore the party's image in the west of Scotland suffered a setback last night when the election agent for Mohammed Sarwar, the Glasgow Govan MP, was charged with breaking election expenses regulations.

Margaret Curran, a community education lecturer, will appear in court in Glasgow next Tuesday accused of contravening rules on the declaration and return of Mr Sarwar's expenses after last May's general election campaign.

Mr Sarwar appeared at Glasgow sheriff court last month on charges including perverting the course of justice, electoral fraud and expenses irregularities. It is believed Mr Curran, 38, is accused of technical breaches of the Representation of the People Act, including failure to sign the MP's expenses declaration in the presence of a justice of the peace. — *Laurence Donegan*

Muslims win bingo hall battle

THE Mecca organisation yesterday removed its name from a bingo hall after protests from Luton's 20,000-strong Muslim community. People protested when the Top Rank Bingo Hall in Bury Park changed its name to Mecca. They said the building's sign associated the name of their holiest city with gambling. Fifteen of the building's 80 windows were smashed on Christmas Day.

Mecca responded by saying the name had a long association with bingo, but after meetings this month with Luton Muslims, it appears to have backed down. Yesterday Mecca would only say that it was pleased an agreement had been reached.

Special school failing

AN INDEPENDENT boarding school where staff let pupils eat in class and leave for a smoke was yesterday declared to be failing to provide an acceptable standard of education.

Inspectors found swearing and aggression were commonplace at Childs Court co-educational residential school in Wincanton, Somerset. "In the large majority of lessons, standards of achievement are unsatisfactory," Ofsted said. The special school, with fees of £27,800 for a 36-week year, looks after 16 girls and 12 boys with emotional and behavioural difficulties. — *John Carol*

Society chief found hanged

THE chief executive of the Marsden Building Society, Edward Shapland, was yesterday found hanged at his home, police said. His wife, Janet, called the police shortly before 6am after discovering her husband's body at their farmhouse in Burnley, Lancashire. Police said there were no suspicious circumstances but an inquest would be held. Mr Shapland, who was 51, had opposed moves by building societies to convert to banks.

Potassium extolled

POTASSIUM, found in oranges, bananas and green leafy vegetables, can significantly lower blood pressure and reduce the risk of heart attacks and strokes, Frank Sacks, of the Harvard School of Public Health, said yesterday.

Dr Sacks's team, writing in Hypertension, said its study of 300 female nurses showed potassium was far more important than magnesium or calcium, both of which are beneficial.

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War is declared on corrupt police

Barry Porter, was to have been charged with seven offences, similar to those of Bradley. All the officers reported sick. In September, 1986, the chief medical officer for the Metropolitan police, recommended that Porter be retired on medical grounds. He was seen by other doctors. All concluded he had a psychiatric disorder.

He was granted ill-health retirement and, "reluctantly", the Met dropped the charges.

Mr Martin and Mr Porter were also granted ill-health pensions in August 1986, and April 1987, respectively. The Metropolitan police "deeply regrets" that it was not possible to bring disciplinary proceedings against them.

In evidence to the committee the Metropolitan police said: "There remains real concern that individuals who are ostensibly mentally strong before their suspension, suffer from a breakdown which is immediately afterwards and yet so quickly recover following their retirement to the extent that they are able to function in demanding areas of employment."

In September Mr Bradley and Mr Martin launched HomeCheck, a company which checks out neighbours and the area for prospective house buyers.

HomeCheck was yesterday told Mr Bradley was no longer with the company.



SWEEPING changes to rid the police of the small minority of corrupt or dishonest officers were proposed yesterday and are likely to receive government approval. The changes, laid to independent investigations of the police and to instant dismissal of officers believed to be guilty of serious malpractice.

The proposals, made by the Commons home affairs select committee, were welcomed by senior officers, the Home Office and the Police Complaints Authority. But the Police Federation, which represents rank-and-file officers, resented them.

Under the recommendations, the standard of proof against officers would be lowered, delaying tactics would be made more difficult, apologies to the public would be made more readily and disciplinary hearings made more open. The committee was asked to report after senior officers had voiced disquiet that a minority of officers might be using the Metropolitan police alone — was posing a major problem.

Chris Mullin, MP, who chaired the committee, said yesterday: "There is no doubt that a small number of officers were behind the backing of the federation and their extremely skilful lawyers have effectively subverted the system by exploiting every conceivable loophole. If these people disappear now, they will be gone."

officers have nothing to fear." But Fred Broughton, chairman of the federation, said: "We are extremely disappointed that a majority of the committee believes that the standard of proof should be reduced."

The federation vice chairman, Ian Westwood, said that there was concern that the proposals could affect operational policing, as officers might "play safe" rather than risk disciplinary proceedings.

Among the issues addressed and the conclusions, not all unanimous, are:

Independence: There had been criticisms that complaints against the police were investigated by other police officers. While there were strong arguments for an independent body, it was felt that a desirable police body would face considerable obstacles, including cost, stood in its way. A Home Office feasibility study of an alternative should be undertaken. The complaints authority should also be given the power to commission investigative work by non-police personnel.

Complaints: Police forces should make greater efforts to

'A minority backed by the federation and skilful lawyers has subverted the system'

The Home Office described the report as "very interesting and thorough," and stated that there would be swift action. It is understood that Jack Straw, the Home Secretary, believes that this time has come for robust action on the issue.

The complaints authority said the proposals would result in a more accountable and respected police service. Peter Moorhouse, the chairman, said: "Many of the criticisms which the committee believes should be made are ones that the authority has long advocated."

David Blakey, president of the Association of Chief Police Officers, said: "Most police officers have nothing to fear from these proposals and will be pleased that, if they are implemented, the tiny minority of wrongdoers in the service will be dealt with more effectively."

Sir Paul McDonnell, commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, said: "The proposals would help him to crack down on the small number of corrupt and dishonest officers. "If the reforms go through, I think they will enhance public confidence. Honest police

resolve complaints by judicious use of apologies and ex gratia payments.

Legal protection for officers: The standard of proof used in civil cases — the balance of probabilities — should replace the criminal case standard — beyond reasonable doubt. The right of silence enjoyed by officers under investigation should be reduced and the circumstances in which officers could be legally represented should be restricted to those occasions when they faced the possibility of losing their jobs.

Delays: There should be changes to allow disciplinary proceedings to go ahead regardless of whether officers had claimed to be too ill, unless the illness related to the officer's ability to answer charges.

Openness: Disciplinary hearings should be held in public unless the presiding officer concluded that there were exceptional reasons for privacy. Files relating to death in custody cases should generally be made available to the deceased's family before inquests.

Judge sued for 'poor advice' to crash victim

Clare Dyer
Legal Correspondent

A ROAD accident victim whose family accepted a \$50,000 in an out-of-court settlement is suing a judge over the advice he gave in the case 10 years ago when the victim died.

In a ground-breaking action, Judge Peter Clark is being sued together with Denise Kingsmill, the deputy chairman of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission who was the solicitor acting for the accident victim, Victoria Griffin.

In 1980 she was aged 18 and was high on speed while crossing a road. She suffered brain damage that left her severely disabled and in need of 24-hour care.

Through her father, Jeremy Griffin, she has given evidence that Judge Clark, a legal aid, it was argued in the High Court yesterday that she could have got a much larger sum from the driver's insurers but for Judge (then Mr Justice) Kingsmill and Ms Kingsmill's alleged negligence and breach of contract.

A key issue in the case is whether a settlement approved by a court — as settlements on behalf of children are — can later be challenged. The defendants argue that the case attacks a court decision and that as an abuse of process" it should be struck out.

Ms Kingsmill, aged 50, was a virtual unknown when she took on the original case. She was a 25-year-old profile lawyer as an employment partner in three City firms, competing for prominent executives including George Walker of Brent Walker.

Just before the settlement was approved, she became a partner in a firm that was named as a defendant on the suit. As well as her commis-

sion job, she is chairwoman of an NHS trust and sits on company boards. Judge Clegg agreed that the Employment Appeal Tribunal was right.

The Griffin lawyers say the family's claim would have been worth around £1 million if it had been proved that the driver was at fault.

The driver claimed that the schoolgirl caused the accident by stepping out into the road.

The Griffin lawyers claim that Kingsmill was negligent in not intervening at the scene or in not informing the police officers who investigated it, not obtaining medical reports, and not commissioning a forensic reconstruction. They argue that Clark was negligent in not advising these steps be taken.

Had the two done so, the law would have changed to the car and the injuries to the girl would have shown the driver's version of events and the police account were incorrect.

Judge Clark denies he ever asked to advise on evidence or on how much the claim was worth. Mr Griffin, who lives North Chalfey, East Sussex, and runs a private school, told the court yesterday that Ms Kingsmill informed him that her insurers had offered £50,000 but had accepted under pressure from his wife, but had then changed his mind.

Ms Kingsmill had suggested seeing counsel's opinion, he said. But Clark, the counsel asked to advise, had agreed with Ms Kingsmill. "Mr Griffin had accepted 'reluctantly'".


The defendants claim the driver was not negligent and there was "no" chance of substantial damages.

The hearing continues today and is expected to finish next week. Judgment is expected to be reserved to a later date.

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Call for rail firm 'hit squads'

Keith Harper
Transport Editor

GOVERNMENT "hit squads" for sub-standard rail operators were called for yesterday after it was revealed that privatised rail companies were forced to pay \$2.4 million in penalties for delivering poorer train services.

Services have been deteriorating, particularly since the autumn, according to a scathing report by John O'Brien, the rail franchise director. He has found that train punctuality and reliability are declining rapidly. Among the worst offenders are Virgin Rail and Connex, the London-based commuter line company run by the French conglomerate, Générale des Eaux.

Mr O'Brien said: "Performance levels generally continue to concern and disappoint me." Punctuality in the last 12 weeks of last year was "deteriorating", and he would be watching the situation closely.

Passenger groups attacked the latest figures as evidence that rail privatisation had delivered a worse deal for passengers. They are to demand that the Government sends "hit squads" to go into sub-standard rail companies and raise standards.

Keith Bill, secretary of the pressure group, Save Our Railways, said: "Just as the Government is sending hit squads into sub-standard schools, they should have hit squads to go into train companies like Virgin, Connex and Great Eastern."

He said the group would be meeting officials of the Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, to press for tighter controls over errant operators. Under privatisation, the rail subsidy had doubled from

\$1 billion to almost \$2 billion a year, but standards were worse "or no better than under nationalisation".

Mr O'Brien's report covers for the first time the year-on-year comparison of punctuality and reliability for the 57 routes run by the 26 train companies. For the 12 months up to last December, 26 routes had better reliability than in the previous 12 months. Twenty-six groups were worse and five stayed the same.

On reliability, South West Trains, which had to cancel services last year because of driver problems, was among those with poorer performance figures. Others faring worse included Connex South Eastern, Connex South Central and Anglia.

On punctuality, Richard Branson's Virgin west coast main line service got better but fell well short of passenger charter targets. Two of Virgin's west coast routes — North-west and Scottish — performed so badly that discounts for season ticket holders were triggered.

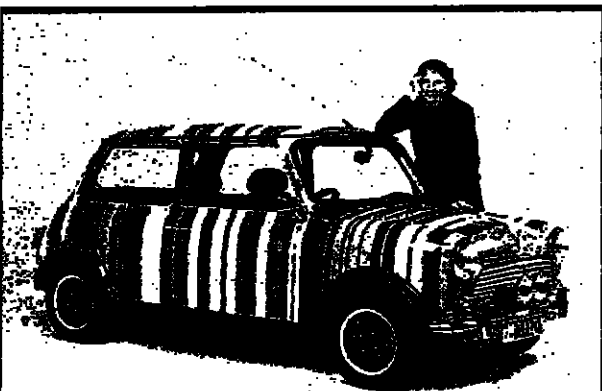
A spokesman for Virgin Rail said one reason for the poor service in Scotland was a bridge collapse. "It is simply untrue that Virgin had made things worse. We took over a clapped-out railway. It takes time to turn things round and we are doing that."

Ivor Warburton, chairman of the Association of Train Operating Companies, said they were still achieving performance figures above those obtained before privatisation. He acknowledged that the trend had been disappointing.

The transport minister, Glenda Jackson, said the Government would not accept poor performance, and looked to Mr O'Brien, the operators and Railtrack to improve this. She expected poor performers to act immediately.



With hopes high for a better catch than last year, anglers set off for the start of the salmon season yesterday at Loch Tay in Perthshire
PHOTOGRAPH: CHRIS BACON



Swinging 90s... Paul Smith with the multi-coloured Mini he designed for the Tokyo motor show

Fashion designer gives Mini a lift

Emily Sheffield

LAUNCHED as "Wizardry on Wheels" more than 30 years ago, the Mini quickly became a symbol of the swinging 60s, driven by the likes of Twiggy, the Beatles and Clint Eastwood.

Now the world-famous car is set to become a fashion icon again as a leading designer Paul Smith has created a special edition Mini.

Limited to a British production run of 300, it will be available in April. It comes in the classic, but unswinging, old English white, blue or black. The designer touch is in the details — the linings of the bonnet, glove box and boot are all lime green, reflecting the colourful linings of his men's suits.

The ultimate fashion victim's car also features an all-black interior as well as exclusive grille, boot and bonnet badges. Which is just as well as the new Mini costs £10,000 — several hundred pounds more

than the standard model.

But the design pales beside the one-off psychedelic Mini that Rover asked Paul Smith to create for the Tokyo motor show last year, after he reproduced the car's image on a skirt. The result was the eye-catching art car which has a total of 98 multi-coloured stripes along its length.

The art car is one of three celebrity-designed cars that have been commissioned by Rover — the other designs are yet to be announced. They will act as inspiration for a national competition this spring to create the best paintwork for a classic Mini.

Paul Smith said yesterday: "I've been asked to design everything from Japanese to French cars. I decided to do the Mini because it's a British classic."

The Paul Smith Mini is just another new chapter in the car's colourful history. Launched in 1959, it was first dismissed as nothing more than an "orange box". But more than 5 million have rolled off the production line since.



The only thing that can stop Venus from becoming the No. 1 by 18 is by accident. And Serena will be even better.

Richard Williams on his daughters

Sport98, page 8

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US backs Baltic Nato entry

James Meek in Moscow

A FURTHER eastward expansion of Nato's borders, taking it within two hours' drive of St Petersburg, comes closer to reality today when President Bill Clinton signs a charter promising United States support to the membership applications of the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

With the entry of Poland, Hungary and the Czech republic still awaiting US ratification — the Senate will debate it in March — the signing will be watched anxiously

on both sides of the Atlantic. It comes almost 80 years to the day after Vladimir Lenin, fearing an imminent German assault on St Petersburg from Estonia, ordered the government to evacuate to the new capital, Moscow. Russia has never shed its insecurity about the Baltic's longing to be part of the West.

But with Moscow increasingly preoccupied with preserving its influence to the south — in the Black Sea, the Caspian region and Central Asia — the biggest practical obstacles to Baltic membership may be in Nato rather than in Russia.

There was a weary, ritualistic tone to Russia's protests

British flyers forced down

TWO Britons piloting a light plane were forced to land after they accidentally crossed into Russian airspace yesterday and the military sent a fighter jet to intercept them.

The pilots were sending

distress signals as they strayed over Russia's far western enclave of Kaliningrad, the Interfax news agency said.

The So-27 pilot heard their Mayday call and signalled them to follow him. — AP.

against the charter yesterday. The Anti-Nato group in the State Duma confined itself to expressing "deep concern".

In the US opponents of Nato enlargement launched a 15-city speaking tour to drum up hostility to Hungary,

Poland and the Czech republic joining.

Karina Wood, the tour coordinator, said: "Why does Clinton seek to burden American taxpayers and soldiers with costs and obligations that the Eastern Europeans

are not able to pay, to defend them from enemies which exist only in their memories, while provoking great hostility in Russia when Russia faces a Europe without any territorial ambitions?"

While the three Baltic presidents — Guntis Umanis of Latvia, Lemart Mari of Estonia and Algirdas Brazauskas of Lithuania — seem to see the charter as a kind of voucher to be redeemed against future Nato membership, US officials are downplaying it, pointing out the unwillingness of Nato's European members to take on a further wave of candidates.

The state department spokesman, James Rubin,

said it was not in America's power to guarantee Nato membership. "In fact, it reaffirms US policy that aspirants can become members only as they prove themselves able and willing to assume the responsibilities and obligations of membership."

There would be uproar in Russia if the Baltics were admitted to Nato. But the idea that Moscow might attempt military action or mount a blockade looks increasingly far-fetched. Recent Russian overtures to the Baltic leaders have been conciliatory. Moscow appears to have realised that its best way to menace the Baltics' campaign is to be friendly, not threatening.

World news in brief

Dreyfus cartoons under the hammer

A COLLECTION of 600 virulently anti-Semitic newspaper cartoons attacking the Jewish army captain Alfred Dreyfus has been sold at auction for £18,000. Pierre Berge, head of the Yves Saint-Laurent fashion house, bought the 100-year-old drawings, originally published to whip up sentiment against Dreyfus, who was accused of spying and waited 12 years for his name to be cleared. Mr Berge said he would show the drawings at a museum he plans to establish at Emile Zola's former home south of Paris. Zola championed Dreyfus's cause. — AP, Paris. Paul Webster, page 13

Minister lashes white farmers

A ZIMBABWEAN cabinet minister has again spoken out against white farmers in the row over President Robert Mugabe's plans to seize their land as part of a peasant resettlement scheme. The state-controlled Herald newspaper quoted the information minister, Chen Chimutengwende, yesterday as saying that the mainly white Commercial Farmers Union was working to perpetuate racial inequality by trying to block the plans. Last weekend he warned farmers that they might be killed by blacks if they continued to oppose the land grab. — Reuters, Harare.

Clashes continue in Guyana

AT LEAST 20 people were hurt in further clashes between riot police and demonstrators protesting at alleged election fraud in Guyana, officials at Georgetown hospital said. Police fired pellet guns late on Tuesday to disperse stone-throwing opposition protesters demanding that President Janet Jagan, who won last month's election, call a new ballot. — AP, Georgetown.

No new bird flu cases

HONG KONG health authorities said yesterday that no new cases of bird flu had been reported since the mass slaughter of poultry two weeks ago and that the high-risk period was over. International health experts are due to arrive today in southern China, from where the infected chickens are believed to have been exported, to investigate the virus, which has killed five in Hong Kong and infected a dozen others. — Reuters, Hong Kong.

Hard rain falls on Slater

THE DAY after the Hollywood premiere of his new film *Hard Rain*, actor Christian Slater began serving a 90-day sentence for attacking his girlfriend during a drug- and alcohol-fuelled brawl. The 28-year-old will do his time in the relative comfort of a small jail in suburban Los Angeles. — Reuters, Los Angeles.

Whale of a survivor



A New Zealand southern right whale swims off the Auckland islands. The whale was thought to have been hunted to extinction, but scientists said yesterday there were likely to be 100 to 150 living in sheltered waters off a remote sub-Antarctic island. PHOTOGRAPH: KIM WESTERHOLM

Pet 'bar-codes' find a way

LOST dogs and cats in Los Angeles are to get hi-tech assistance to help them return to their distraught owners. The city council has started a two-year pilot programme to electronically tag strays. Micro-chips the size of a rice grain, enclosed in glass, are inserted under skin between the animal's shoulder blades. With a device like a supermarket scanner its identity number and the owner's address and telephone number can be displayed on a screen. The scheme will be restricted at first to pets in animal shelters, but it is hoped the idea will be taken up elsewhere in the city. The cost will be met by raising adoption fees at the shelters by £10. — Christopher Reid, Los Angeles.

US envoy enters Kosovo fray

Martin Walker in Brussels

THE United States envoy to the Balkans, Robert Gelbard, was due to arrive in the rebellious Serbian province of Kosovo today as Nato and European officials warned that this latest Balkan powder keg was set to explode.

Two people have died this year in Kosovo: 40 died last year in clashes between the Serbian police and paramilitary forces and the Albanian majority, who outnumber Serbs by 10 to one in the southern province.

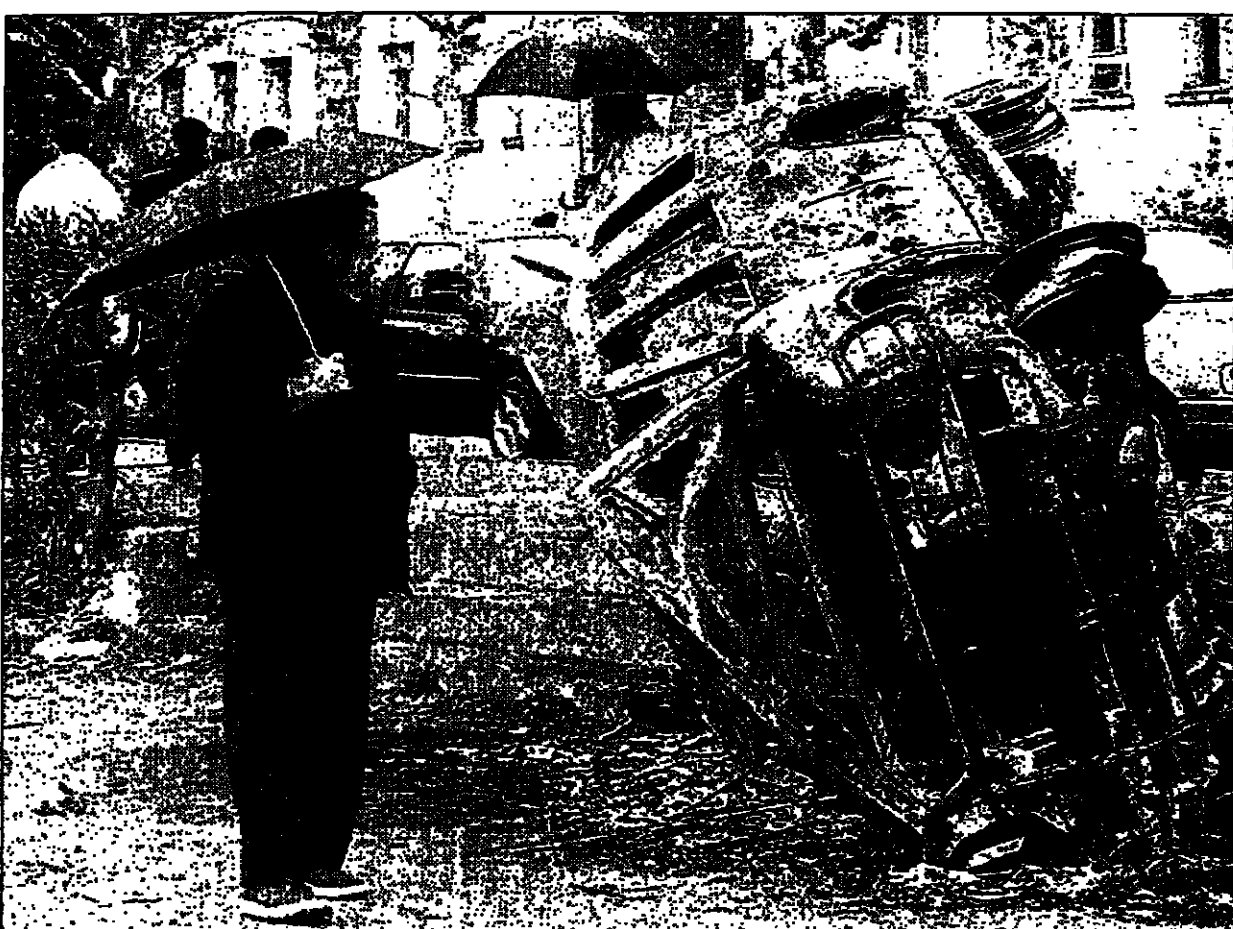
A shadowy "Kosovan Liberation Army" has claimed responsibility for attacks on Serbian police property.

A joint strategy of US and European diplomatic and financial pressure on Serbia to resume talks with the Kosovo Albanians has failed. In Belgrade yesterday Mr Gelbard again urged the Yugoslav president and Serb strongman Slobodan Milosevic to resume talks with the Albanians.

"Kosovo is an integral part of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia but dialogue is critical and represents the best way to achieve what is necessary so that the rights of the Kosovo Albanian people are fully recognised and implemented," Mr Gelbard said.

The "first important step" would be for Mr Milosevic to honour an agreement on reopening Kosovo University to ethnic Albanians.

The US envoy also criticised Mr Milosevic for sup-



The aftermath of riots in Podgorica on Wednesday in support of the outgoing president

PHOTOGRAPH: DARIKO VOLJUNOVIC

porting violent demonstrations in the Yugoslav republic of Montenegro before yesterday's inauguration of the reform-minded President Milo Djukanovic, who defeated a Milosevic ally in elections in October.

The initiative on Kosovo now rests with Britain, the current president of the EU council, which will lead a debate on a new approach when EU foreign ministers meet in Brussels in 10 days' time.

Nato sources have warned that fast-rising tensions in Kosovo may not wait for the EU calendar. A double wave of refugees is on the move: Albanians from southern Serbia into Kosovo, according to the Belgrade press, and Kosovans into neighbouring Macedonia.

The flashpoint of Kosovo University is poised to resign, with nominations for a new rector under way. The last student protests, in December, were put down by Serb police with baton charges.

"A crisis or a crackdown

'A crisis could spill over into Albania and Macedonia and set the Balkans aflame'

could spill over into Albania and Macedonia and set the whole Balkans aflame again," the Danish defence minister, Hans Haackkerup, warned.

Diplomacy has few cards left to play. The US and Europe have made an improvement in Serbia's hand-

ling of Kosovo one of their conditions for lifting the remaining financial sanctions against Yugoslavia. EU pressure on Mr Milosevic to fulfil his promise to let the union open a monitoring office in Kosovo has been ignored.

"Kosovo must rank among the incoming presidency's main concerns."

● Croatia yesterday assumed control of Eastern Slavonia, the last swath of land seized by minority Serbs in 1991, stretching its authority over its entire territory for the first time since declaring independence in 1991. The United Nations had administered the area since November 1995.

Leader comment, page 12

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Algeria mission saved as EU reacts to snub



François Gordon, the British ambassador to Algeria, listens yesterday to a survivor of Sunday's massacre of 103 civilians in Sidi Hamed, near Algiers

Ian Black
Diplomatic Editor

BITAIN is to lead a European Union mission to Algeria next week after Robin Cook, the Foreign Secretary, upgraded the delegation from officials to junior ministers, following a calculated snub by Algiers.

Derek Fatchett, the Foreign Office minister of state, will be accompanied by colleagues from Luxem-

bourg and Austria — fellow members of the "troika" of previous, present and future holders of the EU's rotating presidency — to continue a "political dialogue" before a meeting of EU foreign ministers at the end of the month.

EU states want to express concern about massacres of more than 1,000 people since December 30, while avoiding any suggestion that they are interfering in what the Algerians consider their internal affairs.

British officials said last night that the visit had been finalised after talks between Mr Cook and Ahmed Attaf, Algeria's foreign minister. On Wednesday Mr Attaf rejected an official-level visit as "inappropriate".

Yesterday morning the two agreed that the speedily upgraded mission could discuss "all matters relevant to ending the suffering of the Algerian people" — a bland and carefully chosen catch-all phrase that allows

both sides to claim they have set the agenda. "The troika will be going very much in listening mode and be very ready to listen to the concerns of the Algerian authorities," a British official said.

In Brussels, a spokesman for the European Commission said the talks, on Monday and Tuesday, would touch on "all subjects, no matter how sensitive".

Algeria has consistently rejected outside involvement in the conflict, which

started in January 1992 after the authorities cancelled an election in which Islamists had taken a commanding lead. Before the mission was confirmed, the Austrian foreign minister, Wolfgang Schüssel, warned: "We believe this is a European problem and that if we don't try to stop the killings now, at some point there will be a huge wave of refugees coming to Europe."

According to reports from Algiers, a bomb ex-

ploded on Wednesday night in a mosque in Baraki, a south-eastern suburb of Algiers, killing one person and wounding eight. Liberté newspaper said two young men had their throats cut earlier this week in Zighoud Youcef in the northeastern province of Constantine, while in Setif, the son of the local representative in the upper house of parliament was shot dead.

Standing up to terror, page 13

Beirut offers to guard Israel border

Julian Borger
Middle East Correspondent

LEBANON has said it is willing to move troops to its southern border to control Shi'ite guerrillas in return for an Israeli withdrawal from the country. The offer has been vetoed by Syria, European and Israeli diplomats said yesterday.

Lebanese leaders reportedly told the French foreign minister, Hubert Vedrine, that the country's army could guarantee Israel's security if Tel Aviv withdrew its troops from the southern "security zone", which is controlled by Israel.

The Israeli defence minister, Yitzhak Mordechai, said he was aware of the offer but it meant little without the approval of the Syrian government, which almost completely controls Lebanese politics.

"I know from more intimate forums that Lebanon would be willing to take the decision tomorrow... if it were allowed to do so, and plucked up the courage," he told Israeli radio.

The Lebanese offer — reportedly made by both President Elias Hrawi and the prime minister, Rafik Hariri — appears to have been in response to an interview given two weeks ago by Mr Mordechai. He said Israel would be ready to pull out of its south Lebanon buffer zone in accordance with UN Security Council resolution 425.

Israeli officials said the interview, in an Arabic newspaper, was the country's first formal acceptance of the UN resolution. But Mr Mordechai qualified the offer by stressing the need for security guarantees over the country's border with Lebanon.

The interview came at a time of growing debate about Israel's presence in southern Lebanon and its consequent war of attrition with Shi'ite guerrillas from the Hizbullah and Amal movements.

Thirty-nine Israeli soldiers died in combat in the 9 mile "security zone" last year and 73 were killed in a helicopter crash on the way to Lebanon. A leaving movement for withdrawal was launched in

Israel in September, and the debate has since spread to the highest ranks of the army.

A political analyst in the Israeli foreign ministry said that Beirut's remarks to Mr Vedrine were the clearest response yet to Mr Mordechai's interview, but they were essentially meaningless without the approval of Syria, which has its own forces garrisoned in Lebanon.

The Syrian leader, Hafez al-Assad, is pressing Israel to return the Golan Heights and the surrounding territory, occupied since the six days war in 1967, in exchange for peace.

Diplomats say Syria was close to such a deal with the Israeli Labour government four years ago.

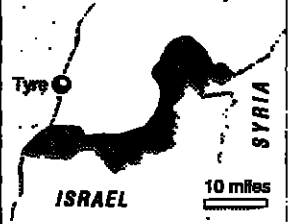
On Tuesday, President Assad restated to Mr Vedrine a long-standing Syrian offer to pick up negotiations where they left off.

Binyamin Netanyahu's rightwing coalition has so far refused this offer. It is reluctant to be bound by Labour's commitments and is unwilling to cede the territory captured in 1967.

Mr Netanyahu has reportedly put out feelers to Damascus through US Jewish intermediaries, so far without visible progress.

European diplomats say that Mr Mordechai's offer was made in the knowledge that it would be rejected by Syria.

They say there is no agreement in Israeli military circles that border security should be entrusted to the Lebanese army.



Standoff at gunpoint between soldiers and Palestinian police

ISRAELI troops and Palestinian policemen took aim at each other yesterday near a Jewish settlement in Gaza, as the lack of progress in the peace talks increased tension in the area.

The two-hour standoff occurred during a demonstration against the Israeli government's expansion of Jewish enclaves in Palestinian areas it has occupied since 1967.

Witnesses said that the Israeli troops trained their guns on the demonstrators near the Kfar Darom settlement. Palestinian policemen raised their guns in response, a scene reminiscent of clashes in 1996 which cost the lives of 61 Palestinians and 15 Israelis.

The confrontation was finally defused by a joint patrol of Israeli and Palestinian officers.

Iraqi animal tests exposed

Mark Tran in New York

UNITED NATIONS weapons inspectors kept up the pressure on Iraq yesterday by revealing the existence of videos showing dogs, mainly beagles, dying slowly and painfully after being sprayed with biological agents in sealed glass boxes.

The chemicals were also injected into the beagles. The latest twist in the stand-off between the UN and Iraq has provided further ammunition for the United States in its demand for UN inspectors to have full access to Iraqi sites.

"This is serious, this is horrendous," the US ambassador to the UN, Bill Richardson, said. "We're talking about potential experiments on human beings. It would be cleared up by the Iraqis allowing the inspectors to go into these sites to see if these reports are true."

Iraq has barred inspection teams led by Scott Ritter, a former US marine captain, accusing him of being a CIA agent.

It has also complained about the prevalence of Americans and Britons in the inspection teams.

Richard Butler, the chief UN weapons inspector, has raised the possibility that the Iraqi foot-dragging is designed to throw his teams off the scent of something potentially explosive.

Mr Ritter's team, inactive for a third day in Baghdad because it was not provided with an escort, is looking for documents about the possible use of biological agents on prisoners.

The issue came to light in a letter to the UN Security Council from the Iraqi envoy, Nizar Hamdon.

Mr Ritter claimed, he wrote, that "in the summer of 1995, between June and August, a number of prisoners had been sent from this site to Abu Ghraib and from there to a secret location where tests of chemicals and biological agents had been performed on them".

The UN has previously reported Iraqi experiments on animals. Its inspectors have uncovered evidence of biological and chemical weapons tests on monkeys, donkeys and horses.

But the UN special commission (Unascom) monitoring Iraq's dismantling of its weapons of mass destruction kept the videos of these experiments secret because they were so shocking. The UN confirmed Newday's report that the videos existed.

Those who have seen the videos say the sprayed dogs panted heavily before collapsing and dying.

The injected dogs jerked violently before dying.

According to the UN, Iraq began testing anthrax and botulinum on animals, in the laboratory and in the field, in 1988.

Mr Butler will hold talks in Baghdad next week with the deputy prime minister, Tariq Aziz, to try to break the deadlock.

He will also visit Paris, where he is expected to discuss the addition of more French technical and political experts to UN teams.

That may placate Baghdad, but US and British inspectors are believed not to trust their French counterparts.

In a recent incident, a US inspector backtracked to check the work of a French colleague who had inspected a room with him.



Pupils chat during an Afrikaans lesson yesterday at Soweto's Morris Isaacson school, where exam pass rates have declined PHOTOGRAPH BY GREG MARINOVICH

Cradle of Soweto uprising falls

Alex Duval Smith
in Johannesburg

PUPILS registering yesterday for the new term at Morris Isaacson school found panes in the windows, desks in the classrooms and even a gardener clearing weeds. But this Soweto school spruced up in recognition of its being the birthplace of the 1976 uprising — is no showcase for education in the new South Africa.

Nearly four years after President Nelson Mandela was elected, the education system — one of the clearest indicators of a democracy's health — appears to be in a free-fall decline.

The release last week of 1987 matric (A-level equivalent) results showed a national pass rate of only 47 per cent, down from 58 per cent in 1994. At Morris Isaacson only 30 per cent of the pupils passed the 12th-year exam, a decline of up to 9 per cent since the early 1990s.

Elias Mashile, the school's principal, was asked for an explanation as the rest of the country. "No

one has any motivation; the parents do not care and the students take drugs. I do not have an answer to pupils who think it more useful to learn how to steal a car," he said.

The co-ed secondary



school — named after an Israeli benefactor in 1961 — is a humble but well-maintained series of low-rise brick buildings surrounded by scrublands in the White City quarter of Soweto.

It would be a mistake to think that because it inspired the June 1976 riots against the compulsory use of Afrikaans as a teaching

medium the school had become a temple of learning. "The pupils today have no sense of what went on here. They come in at nine and leave at 11," said the biology teacher, Shinku Bogatsu, said. "Corporal

Elias Mashile, principal of Soweto's Morris Isaacson school: 'No one has any motivation; I don't have an answer to pupils who think it more useful to learn how to steal a car'

punishment was banned five years ago, but in this culture of violence it is all they understand. Behind him, an Afrikaans lesson was in progress as teenage pupils shouted to friends outside, and others wandered in and out of the classroom.

Mr Bogatsu expected only half his students this term

to have biology textbooks. Mr Mashile had no idea how many pupils to expect. "We shall do the sums in the next two weeks, and then start testing properly," Mr Mashile said.

"I expect around 1,000 pupils; we have 30 teachers, which is a good ratio." State education is haphazard — there are stories of teachers not turning up or being fished out of the shebeen by their pupils — and profoundly corrupt — a vestige of the apartheid years. Up to 40 per cent of secondary school teachers are unqualified, with some not having passed the matric.

The education minister, Sibusiso Bengu, has tried to stem the exodus to new private schools catering to whites and the emerging black middle class. But his 1996 redeployment programme, aimed at moving white teachers to black schools and uniform pupil-teacher ratios, backfired. Thousands of teachers took severance pay.

After last week's matric results Mr Bengu released a 12-point could-do-better list, which blamed apartheid, teachers' lack of

training, and shortage of books and stationery. He claimed changes to the exam were a factor in the apparent decline.

But Andrew Pyper, executive director of the National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa (Naptosa), said the government could not keep blaming the past.

"Apartheid is a strong factor. Coloured schools in the Western Cape still have a pass rate of up to 78 per cent. We have black pupils who grew up being told they would only ever be 'hewers of wood and drawers of water'."

"Understandably, they or their teachers want to prove the opposite by taking the higher of the two levels of the matric exam. But in many cases they have not been given the grounding in earlier school years."

"However, there are many factors to explain the low rate; we need a scientific study which will put ideology to one side and focus on academic achievement."

ANC hit by further corruption claims

David Borensford
in Johannesburg

AN IRISH charity has released documents showing that the man about to become the premier of South Africa's wealthiest province was the subject of an unresolved fraud inquiry.

The disclosures may prove damaging to President Nelson Mandela and the ANC leadership, because they reportedly knew of the scandal but failed to clear up the matter.

Mathole Motshekga, who is about to take over Gauteng — the province which incorporates Johannesburg and Pretoria — was accused in the

late 1990s of embezzling donor funds from the European Union.

A legal expert who investigated the scandal at the time after complaints from the charity involved, Trocaire — described his activities as "fraudulent".

The apparent cover-up of the allegations is the latest in a series of scandals undermining the ANC's claim to principled leadership.

The disclosure follows an appeal by President Mandela last month for the "moral renewal" of the country. Since taking power in 1994 the ANC has sacked two public officials who tried to expose corruption.

State was forced out last year after trying to uncover corruption in his own administration. And the national housing director, Billy Cobbett, was sacked after accusing his minister of being involved in a building scam.

The government is currently dithering over what action to take against senior officials in the state oil company, the Central Energy Fund, after the hiring of Emmanuel Shaw, a former finance minister of Liberia, as its chief consultant. He was given a contract worth nearly 240,000 a year while simultaneously acting as a consultant to the country's biggest listed petrol company, Engen.

The allegations against Mr Motshekga stem from his time as head of the National Institute for Public Interest, Law and Research, which was funded by the EU through Trocaire.

The charity was tipped off in 1990 about financial irregularities in the institute. It voiced its concern to the then president of the National Association of Democratic Lawyers, Plus Langa, and passed on to him the annual report on the institute's activities prepared by Mr Motshekga.

Mr Langa told Trocaire the report appeared to be "extremely fraudulent". He said there were "certain matters which the applicant claims to have handled which are

known to have been incorrect". Trocaire pulled out of the project after failing to get a formal inquiry into the scandal.

The ANC national executive is believed to have known about these allegations when Mr Motshekga stood for election to the Gauteng premiership.

It tried to put pressure on provincial party bosses to back another candidate, but when this was resisted, failed to take further action.

The ANC's poor administrative record has been further dented by the government's failure to pay the pensions of more than 500,000 people in the Eastern Cape for the past two months.

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Analysis The ageing process

How to live longer



This gentleman was unusually old when this photograph was taken in 1865. By tomorrow's standards he would be a spring chicken, if science has its way.
Tim Radford reports

E VOLUTIONARY biologists like to point out that death is part of our bargain with life. Microbes divide and go on dividing forever. But humans and all other complex creatures get their immortality through sex. The genes of your generation are handed on safely to the next, via a roulette arrangement, the argument goes, and nature has done her bit. Now, kindly leave the stage. One of the great mysteries of medical science has been not why people died of cardiovascular disease, or cancer, or a sword through the heart: it was why they died even when there was nothing wrong at all. If human cells divided, and went on renewing themselves by division for 70 years or so, why should they suddenly stop, more or less all at once?

Today, in the journal *Science*(1), a team from the University of Texas confirms what other scientists have suspected for a decade or more. Every one of the million million cells in the human body has its own internal clock, a timekeeper checking off the divisions. Human DNA contains 100,000 or so genes — the bits that make you what you are — but it takes an alphabet of three billion bits of chemical to encode the blueprint. Some of the information seems to be junk. But some of it is a recording angel: the telomeres, molecular structures that cap each pair of chromosomes.

The gene sequences on the telomeres are repeated and repeated and they have a role: every time the cells divide, the telomeres stop the ends of the chromosomes from sticking together. But they also act like a carnet on the Metro of life: you tear one off each time you take a trip. After a number of trips, you cannot go any further. Likewise, after a number of cell divisions, the telomeres are noticeably shorter. One day the cell cannot renew itself any more, and it dies. When that happens, all over the human body, bones get weaker, spines curve, skin sags, brains shrink, shanks wither, gums retreat, hair falls out. It is called getting old.

But some cells do live forever. The germ cells used for human reproduction contain not just the next generation but all the generations after that: they do not stop dividing. Nor do cancer cells: indeed, the big problem of cancer is that the cells are immortal. So what, biologists reasoned, did cancer and germ cells have in common that others did not? The answer: a supply of an enzyme called telomerase. But was that just there because the cells were immortal? Or were the cells immortal because telomerase was there?

The paper today in *Science* settles that one. It is not, however, clear where the knowledge leads. Immortality is not likely to be an option. An extended lifespan might follow from the knowledge, but lifespans are being extended anyway. There have always been those who made it beyond a century: the numbers of these are growing annually. There has been growing talk of people who live to 150, but do not hold your breath. Most people alive now will not live very much longer because of this new finding. That is because ageing is not the only thing wrong with growing old.

People die in huge numbers of the cardiovascular diseases — heart attack and stroke — and from a whole suite of cancers. The ones that survive become candidates for Alzheimer's disease and other neuro-degenerative disorders, and the ones that soldier on start to suffer from osteoporosis, arthritis and other afflictions that make their lives a misery.

The pressure to do something about this has already created a huge problem for tomorrow's developed world: a burden of pensioners-to-be. Medical science began brushing death aside in the last century, when sewerage and clean drinking water were introduced into the

cities, and antiseptics and hygienic practices into the household. The vaccine revolution that began with Jenner 200 years ago has been extended to the poorest corners of the globe: the World Health Organisation wants every child on the planet routinely immunised against six big childhood killers by the end of the century. The discovery of antibiotics 50 years ago meant that doctors could actually cure septicemia, pneumonia, tuberculosis and other old plagues. The new understanding of the role of vitamins set the nutritionists off in one direction. The new understanding of the links between alcohol, tobacco, over-eating and illness set public-health officials off in another direction. Long before the discovery of the enigmatic telomeres, some people were thinking the unthinkable: why actually do we grow old? And how could we live healthily for ever longer?

A DD to this the new science of genetics. There are hundreds of inherited diseases, but the huge, concerted international attempt to pin down, map and understand every one of the 100,000 genes that make a human has led to the discovery of one big fact: the genes we inherit, and the way they work together, and the environment in which they have to survive, will tell us pretty much how and when we could expect to die. This knowledge will be achieved very imperfectly and it will create huge social problems, and it will anyway only be a kind of informed bet on the future. But heart-disease experts have been pointing out for years that even people at risk from cardiovascular diseases could stay healthy and well by sensible diet and exercise(2).

Cancer experts told the Government three years ago(3) that a new wave of drugs was on the way and, by 2020, can-

biological clock

When a cell divides, it first needs to replicate all its chromosomes. 1 It does this with great precision, apart from the last bit of the telomere region at the tip. This never gets replicated, and so the new cell has fewer genetic sequences at the tip than the old cell. 2 Each time a cell divides, the telomeres continue to grow shorter: scientists can determine a cell's age by examining telomere length. 3 In time, telomeres get so short that the cell's chromosomes become tangled. The cell stops dividing and dies.

The trouble with getting old

How DNA gets damaged

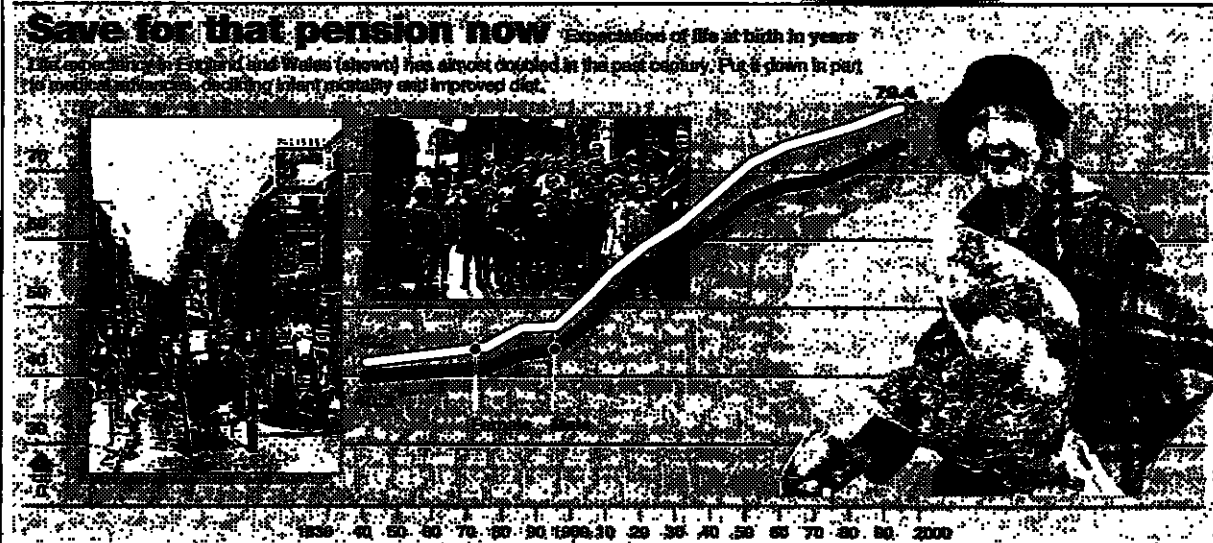
Our body's genetic repair process becomes less efficient as we get older. DNA acquires errors with age, which may be the result of inadequacies with the repair process, mistakes in the cell replication mechanism, or both. The three most common errors are:

- Deletions:** Large sections of DNA are removed from the chromosome and are not replaced.
- Translocations:** Segments of DNA are excised from their normal location and spliced into other areas.
- Point mutations:** Individual nucleotides are changed. The order of nucleotides needs to be precise for protein production. Alterations to these proteins will result in damage to the health of a cell.

The new hopes

What the US scientists showed
The American scientists, at the University of Texas, knew that an enzyme, telomerase, quickly rebuilds the telomeres in young cells — but that it is absent in older cells. So they put extra telomerase genes into human cells growing in dishes. The result: cells kept dividing long after they normally would have stopped. And under a microscope, these new cells appeared biochemically youthful. What if they can do the same within the human body?

Cancer: possible benefits
Cancer is one area which telomerase therapy might benefit. In cancerous cells, the mechanism that limits cell reproduction is ignored. Additionally, telomerase is re-activated: this causes new DNA segments to be added to the chromosome ends. Hence the cancer cells escape the normal ageing process and proliferate beyond control. If scientists can block telomerase, tumours could be checked.



cer patient and specialist would be able to sit before a virtual-reality construction of a tumour, and discuss a tailor-made treatment that could "manage" or even cure it. Death, even from the Big C, was no longer inevitable.

This created an opportunity for governments to do something. Two years ago, the DTI launched an initiative called Equal, an acronym for Extend Quality Life. "If we set ourselves the target of increasing rates in an effort to match a mouse lifespan with an elephant's, and found a match of

sorts: heartbeat rats. The differences between the two in Greenwich time were huge, but many creatures turned out to live the same length as measured in the pounding of the heart. Others began to study animal life's curious bargain with oxygen, the gas which creates the free radicals that seem to trigger the seeds of cancer, and with an evolutionary history that fitted us for survival during hardships — but made us at greater risk of death during the fat times.

One of these ways of thinking led in the direction of diet and lifestyle. It became clear that lunch and dinner were intimately linked to life and death: olive oil and broccoli, fresh fruit and red wine were good. Scotch, deep-fried Mars bars and chip butties were bad. But it went beyond that, too. Eating well was itself a health risk, if experiments with rats were anything to go by. One scientist discovered that rats placed on a low-calorie diet — the right mix of nutrients, but always kept hungry — would live for at least a third



Another candidate for Club Mad 13

longer(5). It worked for rodents, it worked for roundworms, fruit flies, fish and protozoans. Why should it not work for humans too?

Others began examining the foods we did eat for magic ingredients that might themselves be responsible for longevity, or at least health. They found agents that combat heart disease and cancer concentrating on the skin of grapes (which might explain why moderate intake of red wine seemed to go with good health) and in the greens that children hate, such as broccoli. Sometimes they found elixirs in plants that humans hardly ever eat: only this week, scientists in New York reported that something in the herb ginkgo biloba turned out to make rats learn faster and live an average of five months longer. But the big secret, most decided, would lie somewhere in the DNA code itself.

THE consensus last night was that the Texas scientists today have confirmed it. But there is a lot more research already on different aspects of cell ageing. Telomeres are only part of the story. What, however, do people do with this knowledge? The population of Britain is growing very slowly. The proportion of that population that is old is growing very swiftly. Over the next 30 or so years, the proportion aged between 75 and 84 is forecast to increase by 50 per cent. The number of centenarians is expected to grow tenfold: by 2031, there could be 45,000 of them. What are they all going to do? Will they all be glad to be alive? What kind of further life can they look forward to, and what kind of pact can they make with death, the Grim Reaper, the ruffian on the stair?

Professor Mark Ferguson, of the University of Manchester, and one of the architects of the Equal strategy, is all for the "pop-dill-you-drop" ambivalence. "Five or 10 years ago, ageing was an intractable problem. It was something we could not get our brains around. The exciting thing now is that ageing becomes tractable. Piece by piece, the pieces come together, and we actually begin to understand some of the mechanisms. And the big hope is that when we do that, we may be able to alleviate some of the disorders."

"I don't think anybody is trying to make anybody live longer. It is a real quality-of-life issue. The most effective thing is that people be healthy until the day before they die, and then they die quickly and spectacularly. That would be economically very good."

Sources: (1) Extension of lifespan by introduction of telomerase into normal human cells, by Andrea Bodnar et al (*Science*, January 16 1998); (2) Five Steps To A Healthy Heart, leaflet by the British Heart Foundation; (3) Vision For Cancer 1995-2020, Imperial Cancer Research Fund (September 1995); (4) Ian Lang addressing the Social Market Foundation, June 20 1998; (5) Caloric restriction and ageing, by Richard Weindruch (*Scientific American*, January 1998). **Graphics sources:** ONS, via Government Actuary's Department; The Clock of Ages: Why We Age, by John J Medina (CUP). **Photographs:** Julia Margaret Cameron (1865). **Research:** Matt Keating. Tim Radford is the Guardian's science editor.

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New show, old songs

First get the principles of welfare reform right

TONY BLAIR has learned a hard lesson. He confessed in an article in yesterday's Times that he was "beginning to see why most politicians tend to steer clear of welfare." There were few quick gains or thank-yous. Most meaningful changes were long-term with no short-term political pay-offs. Undaunted, the Prime Minister set off yesterday on his welfare reform roadshow, determined to persuade the public of the need for radical reform before moving to the second stage when the government will publish detailed proposals for debate and discussion. There is one problem with this strategy. The case for reform is already accepted. It is the solutions and difficult choices we need to debate. The reform roadshow may be necessary but that has more to do with the urgent need of the Government to recapture public confidence after its disastrous cuts to one parent benefits, rather than the need to persuade the public of the advantages of change.

Yesterday's avalanche of trends and statistics from the social security department only repeated much of the evidence which Peter Lilley and Labour's national commission on social justice unveiled during the 1990s. Yes, society has moved on since Beveridge: more women in work, more marital break ups, more job switching, and more people living longer. Social security spending has increased eightfold in real terms in the last 50 years yet the proportion living in poverty — below half average earnings — continues to climb. But unlike Labour's national commission, yesterday's reports ignored the brutal widening of inequality in the last two decades and failed to spotlight the degree to which benefits fall short of people's needs.

Labour is right to restructure welfare. Both other major parties agree too. It's right to tackle dependency and find new ways of helping single parents,

young or disabled people, and the long-term unemployed back into work. Welfare dependency is a cruel life. It breeds depression, leads to severe physical and mental deterioration, and an alarming increase in suicide. Medical researchers have shown the phenomenal increase in mortality rates which long-term unemployment generates. It blights the lives of children. There are now three million — a threefold increase in the last two decades — struggling to survive on benefits. The daily allowance falls short of a big burger, large fries, and shake, let alone the necessities of modern life. Labour has every reason to be proud of its £3.5 billion welfare-to-work programme from its special one-off utility tax.

What's worrying is the way that Labour exaggerates the cost of the system, exaggerates fraud, and exaggerates savings which welfare-to-work will make. Tony Blair talks about social security costing more than education, health, and law and order combined. But it does in most developed countries. Indeed, Britain is in the bottom quarter of the 21 OECD member state league table in the proportion of GDP spent on social protection (social security, health and education). Britain began cutting social security benefits in 1980 and four years ago was boasting of how far ahead of rival states it had got.

What the country needs is a debate about principles — and some detailed costed options. How selective does Labour want to be? What is the role of universal benefits in its modernised system? Why pursue the American idea of low pay tax credits when we already have a well developed family credit benefit? Like benefits, tax cuts cost money. Last night the Prime Minister promised he would never desert those in genuine need. There's a simple guarantee: a new earnings link for benefits of those who cannot return to work.

The new Balkan flashpoint

Milosevic must be told: Kosovo is not an internal matter

IT WAS in Kosovo that Slobodan Milosevic first waved the flag of Serbian extremism ten years ago, on the road to his ascendancy in Belgrade and the destruction of Yugoslavia. It is grimly appropriate that, with Milosevic still in control of the rump of Yugoslavia (Serbia including Kosovo plus, less certainly, Montenegro), the trouble he started in Kosovo has now re-ignited. The fear that, after Bosnia, the southern Balkans would become the new flashpoint is beginning to come true.

The Albanians in Kosovo have shown great restraint in the face of Serbian occupation. A parallel administration, led by the Democratic Alliance of Kosovo under Ibrahim Rugova, has demonstrated remarkable skills of peaceful resistance. But their restraint is fraying as the non-violent strategy seems unable to deliver results. Students are frustrated at exclusion from college and from jobs, and are becoming a new political force. A shadowy guerrilla movement the Kosovo Liberation Movement (UCK) — once suspected of being a provocation from Belgrade — has engaged in real battles with the Serbian police. Among a people which remembers not only recent brutalities but the atrocities of the Second World War, there is growing support for the UCK (though mixed with fear at the danger of Serbian reprisals). Mr Rugova's administration is seen as ineffective, as is the Albanian government in Tirana which has been encouraged by the EU to seek accommodation with Belgrade.

This week's troubles in Montenegro, where supporters of the outgoing hard-line president Momir Bulatovic disrupted the build-up to yesterday's inauguration of the reform-minded Milo Djukanovic, is also disturbing. Serbian propaganda claims that Mr Djukanovic had only won on the votes of the "schiptars" — the offensive name for Albanians. The xenophobia of the Bulatovic camp is reminiscent of Mr Milosevic's inflammatory populism in Montenegro — as well as Kosovo — ten years ago, and the special US envoy to the Balkans Robert Gelbard (who will visit Kosovo today) has criticised the Serbian leader for supporting the violence in Podgorica.

To the south, independent Macedonia has its own Albanian question. Skopje has not handled this very wisely, with its heavy-handed clampdown on an Albanian-language university in Gostivar which led to riots last July. There is a real danger of unrest spilling over from Kosovo, through an influx of refugees and with the UCK already claiming to have planted bombs in Macedonia. The decision of the Security Council to remove the UN protection force, Unpredep, from the Macedonian border by the end of the summer is a bad mistake which should be reversed. But the main priority for the US and EU is to make it totally clear to Mr Milosevic that Kosovo is not an internal matter. Conflict in the southern Balkans could quickly become a threat to international peace — and not for the first time.

The debt we all owe Alastair

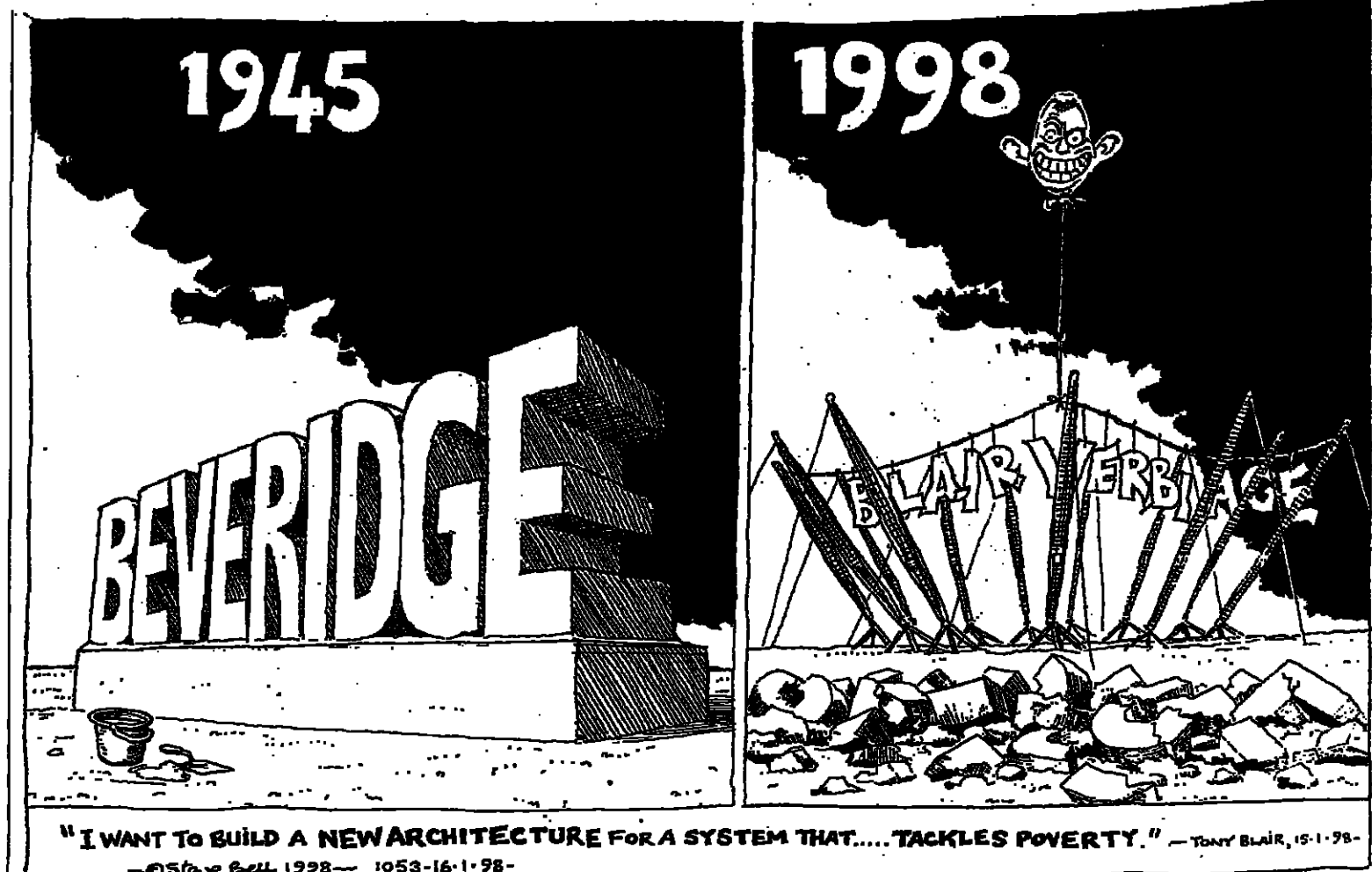
His hand can surely be seen behind many seminal texts

SOME OF the media's more naive commentators have been surprised to discover that the Japanese prime minister's apology in the Sun this week was all but ghost-written by Alastair Campbell and the press team from Number Ten. Apparently Ryutaro Hashimoto didn't come up with the stuff about "tough decisions" and a "compassionate yet efficient society" all by himself. He was helped along by the ex-tabloid pros of Downing Street.

Well, this came as no surprise to the Guardian. We recently stumbled across early drafts of some of the most celebrated texts in human history — suggesting Mr Hashimoto is not the first world leader to avail himself of Mr Campbell's masterful touch. What, for example, are we to make of the original notes for Winston Churchill's wartime address: "We shall fight them on the beaches, within current spending limits." Or President Kennedy's landmark

speech at the Berlin Wall: "Ich bin ein Berliner — but call me Jack." The first Gettysburg address actually proclaimed: "Government of the people, by the people, for the people — we were elected as New Lincoln, we shall govern as New Lincoln." The original US Constitution began, "We the People's People." Research shows Jesus Christ promising to be, "Tough on sin, tough on the causes of sin."

The greatest works of drama have not been immune to the Blair-Campbell genius. Before William Shakespeare started dunning it down, Hamlet actually asked, "To be or not to be — look, that's one of the really hard choices we're going to have to make." Walt Disney's seven dwarves used to sing a different tune: "Hi-ho, hi-ho, it's off to work we go." The government of Japan are not the only ones to owe Alastair Campbell. The English language itself is in his debt.



Letters to the Editor

Eight ways to clean up our act

WE already know how to prevent food poisoning (Leader, January 15) by employing adequate methods of hygiene at all stages of food production, preparation and consumption.

What we need now is a system for ensuring that these standards are observed throughout the food chain.

This must address the problem not only at the supermarket level but also at the level of the village butcher and the small town restaurant, as well as educating the food producer and preparer in both the domestic and commercial sense.

Roy Fuller,
59 Ryelash Green,
Three Mile Cross,
Reading RG7 1ES.

THE current concerns of "food experts" give no practical help to the housewife. It is what happens to food once it reaches the kitchen that is of paramount importance: hygiene, food storage, reheating, adequate cooking, defrosting, etc. It is only since home economics has been given less prominence in the school curriculum that many of the problems have arisen.

Phyllis Flood,
60 Widney Manor Road,
Solithull BN1 3JQ.

IT is crucial for the Government to restore confidence in food safety not just for the sake of the food industry and the consumer, but also to repair the damage to the reputation of British science.

The Government must allow the Food Standards Agency the freedom to employ a broad range of scientific talent to a progressive and review in order to produce the most comprehensive research recommendations. Scientists must ensure they discuss the state of knowledge and standards openly; there must never be any cover-ups in science.

The prize for the creation of a successful FSA will be to increase British influence in Europe, to restore confidence in British food, and to alter the culture from the defensive stance of the previous government to a progressive and proactive position in every aspect of food policy. The benefit to science will be equally great.

Dr Ian Gibson MP,
House of Commons,
London SW1A 0AA.

WHILE recognising the sensitive nature of the smoking debate (Pressure for wider curbs on smoking, January 13), we believe it is important for restaurants to retain the right to cater for all

their customers. Indeed, in a 1997 survey of our members, well over two-thirds of respondents said they had introduced smoking and non-smoking areas in either their restaurant or bar area.

We consider that a voluntary approach is appropriate as a uniform ban would face difficulties in implementation, with smaller restaurants, in particular, suffering problems. A similar ban in New York City led to a 25 per cent rise in the number of restaurant closures resulting in the loss of 2,779 restaurant jobs.

Michael de Costa,
Chairman,
Restaurants Association,
London WC2B 6JR.

WHY the need to ban smoking in all pubs? Given that 84 per cent of adults approve of a smoking ban, any pub that refuses to ban its smokers will become very rich.

Jonathan Bagley,
26 Garden Street,
Tudor House, London SE14 5HW.

YOUR article on the risks that remain in the smokers' quit should have made it clear that the risks if they don't quit are very much bigger. Although about half of all persistent smokers eventually get killed by their habit, stopping

smoking works — smokers who stop before they have incurable cancer (or some other serious disease) do avoid most of their risk of eventually being killed by tobacco.

Prof Richard Peto,
Radcliffe Infirmary,
University of Oxford.

THE first test of the Government's resolve on excessive car use (Alarm at killer traffic fumes, January 14) will be on January 30 with the Second Reading of the Road Traffic Reduction Bill. Liberal Democrat MP, Don Foster, cleared the first Bill through Parliament. The new Bill adds the national targets which the Conservatives took out. It will have full Liberal Democrat support; Labour needs to offer the same.

Matthew Taylor MP,
House of Commons,
London SW1A 0AA.

WITH 24,000 people a year dying because of fumes from our car culture, the police seem to do little about the one in 10 vehicles which pollute beyond the MOT allowances. In comparison with the 4,000 deaths a year from road accidents, their priorities are unbalanced.

Anand Zenz,
10 Tinworth Street,
London SE11 5EH.

Dear Tony...

MOST of the next generation of small hill farmers are opting out, in spite of the considerable subsidies they are currently receiving (Withering Heights, G2, January 13). Current government thinking will lead not only to further rural depopulation, but also to the loss of many of our most valued landscapes, whose character has been formed by small farmers over thousands of years, unlike the wilderness national park areas in other countries.

Do we want these lived-in landscapes to become cloned theme-parks regulated by the heritage industry? Surely, we should be increasing subsidies to small farmers, who love the land, to balance the degradation inflicted by over-generous subsidies to factory farmers.

Fay Godwin,
12 Woodberry Crescent,
London N10 1P3.

I AM delighted to read of Chris Smith's passionate belief in nurturing artistic and creative activity (Why are these people wrong? G2, January 12). Perhaps he might consider in his "root and branch review" why artists are obliged to pay full business rates on their studios, the same as if they were running, say, a merchant bank from the premises. Even the Tories were proposing a change of rates on small businesses.

John Keane,
10 Highbury Hill,
London N5 1AP.

OF course there are no people in the photos of Royal Albert Docks (People before beauty, Society, January 14). An important aspect of this award-winning project is that it establishes a high quality landscape prior to development. Buildings — and people — come next.

Peter Wright,
Chairman, Design Jury,
Landscapes Institute Awards,
111 Melrose Avenue,
London SW15.

Dear Julie...

WILL Julie Burchill (Letters, January 15) please pick on someone her own size? I believe wrestling fans are looking for a replacement for Big Daddy.

Toby Young,
269 West 4th Street,
New York, NY 10014.



Age concern

VOLUNTEERING is an essential addition to Libby Brooks's top tips for defying the years (Still clocking in after all these years, G2, January 14). Our volunteers say that giving time to schools, hospitals, community projects and doctors' surgeries keeps them young. Research also suggests that it lowers blood pressure, reduces cholesterol and prolongs active life.

Janet Atfield,
Community Service Volunteers,
287 Pentonville Road,
London N1 9NJ.

Ms McAliskey shouldn't leave us

THE request by the German authorities for the extradition of Roisin McAliskey (Extradition case goes to Straw, January 3) demonstrates the extraordinary loss of constitutional protection for the individual which European agreements have caused.

We have no sympathy for the cause Miss McAliskey supports, but her rights as a British subject under the historical protection of habeas corpus (1640 and subsequent amendments Acts) were curiously tossed away by the British government when it signed the European Convention on Extradition.

Under habeas corpus, no British subject can be arrested and held without prime facie evidence of wrongdoing. But under the 1989 Extradition Act, which implemented the terms of European treaties, the German authorities can have Miss McAliskey (or any other British subject) arrested in the UK and extradited without prime facie evidence being presented.

Furthermore, there is evidence from the treatment by the German legal authorities of a New Zealander that German courts cannot be relied

upon to uphold the principles of justice expected in the UK. This individual was held in a psychiatric cell against the provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights, no extradition papers were actually served on him, and curfew hearings were held in the absence of both him and his lawyer. He was extradited because "there are no concrete indications suggesting that subject person may not have committed the acts" — thus reversing the chief principle of British justice, that of presumed innocence.

What is even more extraordinary is that the British Government is considering extraditing McAliskey to a country which will specifically not extradite Germans to the UK. As in other European treaty-making, German bureaucrats have surrendered, in the name of European integration, the British people's historical rights but got nothing in return. Miss McAliskey's lawyers should point to Magna Carta under which "no freeman shall be dispossessed of his liberties".

Norris McWhirter,
Stockfield,
Northumberland.

Dome cooking

LINDA Grant misses the point (Happiness is dome-shaped, G2, January 13). The real reason for all the knocking and whinging is because the New Millennium Exposition is only temporary. The difference between the dome and all the examples she rhapsodises over — the Louvre Pyramid, the Eiffel Tower, Eurostar, Euro-Disney, the Chrysler Building, the Empire State Building — is that they were built to last.

Peter Eford,
Millennium City Ltd,
Pinewood Studios,
Iver Heath, Bucks SL0 0NH.

HOW refreshing to read Linda Grant. There has been so much carping that it has been forgotten that the UK is leading the way globally for the millennium with this momentous initiative.

The projects of 1851 and 1987 were similarly ridiculed and mocked, but transpired to be enormously successful.

Stephen O'Brien,
Chief Exec, London First,
Suffolk Street,
London SW1Y 4HH.

A Country Diary

GLOUCESTERSHIRE: The blustering gales of the first week of the year had seemingly effected only superficial damage — a few split tarpaulins and a lot of timber to pick up. But the unnoticed damage nearly turned into a death trap for one Herdwick shearing. A valuable discipline at dawn rations' time is to count the flock. It's not easy because, even with heads down in the trough, they tend to move about, so the count has to cope with what can be a moving target. I counted once and thought I was one short; I counted again and I was sure I was. So where was she? Securely trapped by three long brambles in a 30-yard stretch of old hedging, which had been partly uprooted by the gales, I discovered. The disturbance in the hedge had released the brambles and they are a deadly trap in the thick winter wool of a sheep. She was effectively pinioned three ways, and, in trying to pull free, had trapped herself even more tightly. I made the mistake of going immediately to try and free her. Unless I

Emma Bonino and the Duke

PAUL Brown's article (Duke lambasts destructive EU fishing policy, January 13) shows there is a clear misunderstanding of the European Community policy on fisheries agreements with third countries.

As part of the Common Fisheries Policy, agreements between the EC and third countries are open to any member state of the EU wishing to benefit from fishing opportunities in the waters of those countries. They are not intended to resolve a problem of over-capacity resulting from overfishing in European waters; on the contrary, they are intended to safeguard the activity of fishing vessels that have traditionally operated outside those waters.

Fishing rights under these agreements are limited to surplus fisheries resources that the coastal states concerned cannot exploit. The European fleet allowed to fish in third countries' exclusive economic zones does not compete with the local fleet. Strict delimitation of fishing zones and target species are included in the agreements to avoid any conflict of interest between fleets.

For instance, in the case of the EC/Senegal fisheries agreement mentioned in your article, most of the fishing rights granted by Senegal to the EU fleet concern deep demersal species, which are not fished by the local fleets (these, incidentally, have increased in size considerably over the past 10 years).

These agreements reflect the Community's concern to ensure responsible fishing and the promotion of the local fisheries sector. They make provision for the use of specific gears, catch reporting, the permanent presence on board of third-country observers, for taking on local crew and for fish to be landed locally to supply the local market or canning industry. A significant percentage of the financial compensation granted by the EU in exchange for fishing possibilities is earmarked for the development of the local fishing sector.

These agreements fully comply with the law of the sea, FAO's Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and the UN Agreement on Straddling Stocks and High Migratory Species. They contribute effectively to the development of sustainable fisheries. And they are more transparent than private agreements.

Emma Bonino,
European Commissioner for Fisheries and Consumer Affairs, Brussels.

A Country Diary

I am in pyjamas. I always have a penknife on me. But I had no gloves and my knife would not sever the knots of bramble and wool, which frantic struggling had produced. I went back to the outhouse for leather gloves and strong clip-pers, but not before I had wrecked my hands in this first try with the thorns of the bramble. Perhaps because she was able to see the rest of the flock, she had not gone into the ready-to-die syndrome, which sheep are wont to adopt when they are in trouble. She was still lively and had the ovine wit to recognise that I was trying to help. Which was a good thing, because it took me a full 20 minutes of struggling with my knees, before I could free her, and she is still carrying a topknot of short lengths of severed bramble. But she was clearly delighted to rejoin the flock and made rapidly for the hay-baler and a drink of water. We devoted Sunday, and it took all day, to cutting and burning most of the wrecked hedge.

COLIN LUCKHURST

John Pinkerton

Programmed to succeed

JOHN Pinkerton, who has died aged 78, was a leading figure in the golden age of British computing and designed LEO, the world's first business computer.

After a national science degree at Cambridge, Pinkerton did wartime work on radar, and post-war returned to Cambridge to work on ultrasonic waves in liquids, which was of interest to Dr Maurice Wilkes who was working on the design of a computer called EDSAC. Pinkerton then answered an advertisement in Nature from

the tea-shop chain J Lyons for someone to design a computer for them — Joe Lyons felt that the stock-control and payroll were becoming unmanageable by manual methods. A team had visited America two years earlier, and concluded that no one on either side of the Atlantic had yet built a suitable business-machine. So Lyons made the risky decision to do it themselves.

Not surprisingly, Pinkerton based LEO (Lyons Electronic Office) on the Cambridge EDSAC, to which Lyons had contributed £3,000 for its development. When asked whether he was confident of producing

a commercial computer, he answered, "Well, yes, I think I can, but whether it will be reliable is another matter." This proved a realistic assessment of all computers until the 1980s.

LEO was built in 1949 and started running the world's first routine business application in November 1951.

When he joined Lyons, Pinkerton said that he would only stay for two or three years. In fact, he stayed on as a director of LEO Computers when it started to sell the computers it had originally built for its own use. His final success in the LEO years was

working on the LEO 111 range. This incorporated both micro-programming and micro-programming as early as 1962, two years before the announcement of the IBM 360 series, generally considered to be the first modern multi-programming computer.

The atmosphere of those days was summed up by Leo Fanti, a mathematician in the LEO team, "no corporate goal can ever succeed if it cannot also provide the ambitious individual with the challenge of extraordinary difficulty and the promise of self-fulfilment... nothing had so much meaning, relevance and truth

as the set of values I saw in the early LEO days." Another LEO pioneer, Mike Gifford, who became chief executive of the Rank Organisation, has said that "after LEO, everything else was a doddle".

Pinkerton was known as a boffin who believed that technology should serve its users. He was able to explain the most obscure technicalities in everyday language. Today's writers of incomprehensible computer manuals should learn from his example.

In the heyday of British computing, the 1950s and early 1960s, innovative computers from Ferranti and EMI

as well as LEO, outmatched America's in almost every department, except market share. The pre-eminence of LEO is even recognised in the US. Last year Computing Review, the journal of the Association of Computing Machinery, declared that "LEO was unquestionably the first disciplined approach to commercial data processing."

After LEO was absorbed into ICL in 1968, Pinkerton became a leading figure in world standards for computers and telecommunications, chairing the telecommunications policy group of the Business Technology Association.



John Pinkerton... answered an ad and became a world leader in computer design

In retirement, he edited the ICL Technology Journal and its successor, Ingenuity, until his death.

He did voluntary work at the Missing Persons Helpline Centre in West London. He was also a member of the Court of Liverymen of the Worshipful Company of Information Technologists.

Pinkerton had a gift for long-term friendships. A group of his argumentative Cambridge undergraduate friends and their wives held annual dinners in his house

until last year. They included the mathematician physicist Sir Hermann Bondi, who became Director General of the European Space Organisation, and the Nobel Prize winning molecular biologist Sir John Kendrew. The group was an influential Cambridge scientific mafia through the past four decades.

He is survived by Helen, who he married in 1948, and by a son and daughter.

Richard Searson

John Pinkerton, computer scientist, born August 2, 1919; died December 22, 1997

Mae Questel

The voice of boop-oop-a-doop

MAE Questel, who has died aged 89, was one of those few figures better known in Hollywood's film community for her voice than her face.

She was an actress who appeared in vaudeville and later specialised in playing "Yiddish mamas" in plays and films, but when it comes to finding her name in Hollywood record books it has to be as the voices of Betty Boop and Olive Oyl in the black and white cartoons that helped fill movie programmes from the 1930s right up to 1967.

She was quite a performer when it came to voices. In her time, she was on stage in vaudeville theatres — including America's most prestigious, the famous Palace on Broadway — impersonating not just stars such as Fanny Brice and Marlene Dietrich but even Maurice Chevalier and Rudy Vallee.

Questel was born in New York's Bronx and it was there that she first seriously contemplated going into showbusiness. She won a local talent contest with an impression of Helen Kane, the Boop-oop-a-doop Girl so beautifully recreated by Marilyn Monroe in the film, *Some Like It Hot*. The success set her on the road to non-fame — no one bothered to find out whose voice they were listening to in those 150 Betty Boop cartoon shorts — but nevertheless she became extraordinarily valuable to her own little empire in Hollywood.

She had her principal moment of glory in the 1930s when she recorded the Shirley Temple song, *The Good*



When Questel appeared in public it was always Betty Boop's voice people wanted to hear

Ship Lollipop and it sold two million copies. All the public knew, however, was that they were buying the voice of Betty Boop.

Then in 1933 her voice changed — to that of Olive Oyl, Popeye's girlfriend. She made more than 450 Popeye cartoons until their appeal finally waned 30 years later.

She was also the voice of Sweet Pea, the baby in the series.

It was with mixed feelings

that Questel dropped the voices and became a "face". She had been playing Jewish women, nearly always caricatures, for years. In 1959 she took the part in the Broadway hit, *A Majority of One* and was also in the 1961 film version.

The roles all had different names, but the part was essentially the same. The woman in *A Majority of One* was the blood sister of Woody Allen's mother whom she played in his *New York Stories*. She also appeared in *Funny Girl*. But it was her voices for which the public had most affection. *Casper, the Friendly Ghost* was Questel, too, as were a number of other cartoon characters.

If she had any complaint it was that when she appeared in public, it was always Betty Boop whom the people wanted to hear. That, though, was better than no fame at all. Woody Allen gave both her and her audiences the chance they seemed to want most when she sang the Betty Boop theme song, *Chameleon Days*, in his story of the human chameleon, *Zelig*.

She was once asked the secret of staying in business for so long and reverted to her favourite Yiddish Mama character: "Don't make a megillah out of every little thing." A megillah is a book of Bible stories, not at all the kind of thing that would feature a boop-oop-a-doop routine.

She leaves a son.

Michael Freedland

Mae Questel, actress and singer, born 1908; died January 4, 1998



Mae Questel... it was with mixed feelings that she dropped the voices and became a 'face' PHOTOGRAPH: CORBIS-BETTAMANN

Sir Michael Tippett: Appreciations

Peter Young writes: Sir Michael Tippett (Obituary, January 10) was 74 when I met him during my research into conscientious objection in the second world war. My first impression of him as being his own man was confirmed in his early remark: "Being a natural maverick, I read Trotsky before I read Marx" and was pretty clear that Trotsky had the truth of it. Stalin's notion of socialism in one country was a backward move.

Appalled by Stalin's show trials, he explained that he began to ponder issues of violence and the extent to which an artist could or should abstract himself from social commitment.

I found a quick empathy with his view because the greatest influence on him was my own hero, Shaw, whom he regarded as a very great humanitarian. The decisive piece of writing for Tippett in his early days was the preface to *Heartbreak House*: "If it is necessary to save civilisation then Michelangelo must leave his chisel and Newton his fluxions. The presumption is that you are saving civilisation; the presumption is inaccurate."

It became a real issue for him at the start of the second world war when he began writing *A Child of Our Time* under the feeling that he might not survive and was deeply worried by it. When the work was complete in 1941 he calmed down, having moved over from being a revolutionary believing in revolutionary violence towards some other element of compassion, which took him closer to pacifism. The only course he could adopt was to become a conscientious objector even though it led to three months imprisonment in Wormwood Scrubs. It was the courage of a conviction reasoned over many years.

Peter Baker writes: Sir Michael Tippett had a long association with the Leicestershire Schools Symphony Orchestra from 1965 as a guest conductor and composer. He conducted the orchestra in performances of his own works including the *Shires Suite*, which he wrote especially for the orchestra's 21st anniversary — this year is their 80th.

When he was rehearsing the suite in a school hall a dinner lady dropped a tray of cutlery and a delighted Sir Michael exclaimed that it was just the sound he was looking for. Young players gained tremendous inspiration from his work and his conducting.

who's just made the West Ham first team is unattached. This week anyway.

How to be a football wife, instead of a football widow, in Four Four Two.

Mindless telly

SINCE the dawn of its invention, television has lured us into watching some ridiculous programmes simply because they're there. Back in the days when telly was broadcast from a tent somewhere in north London, grown men would sit around their flickering sets watching a man in a dinner jacket doing bird impressions. And, because this palfrey fare was brought to them by the cutting edge of technology, they were prepared to call it entertainment. In this match, little has changed. Our appetite for useless information, no less than our willingness to watch characters whom we'd strain to avoid in real life, would seem to be off the scale of reason.

In short, we have a peculiar relationship with TV because we think that we're actually doing something while watching it. Which we very seldom are. More often than not, the whole business of watching telly is little more than reverting to the behaviour of those pioneer viewers who didn't know why they were looking at the man in the dinner jacket, but hoped he'd get his own series.

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Bill Matthews

Poetry in emotion

THE position of Bill Matthews in the world of American letters is assured — and, at the time of his death aged 55, was in the ascendant in 1996 he won the National Book Critics Circle Award and, last year, the Modern Poetry Association's Ruth Lilly Award.

He had been president of the Poetry Society of America and chairman of the National Endowment of the Arts, as well as being a professor of English at City College in New York. He gave readings in Britain, France and Italy, and in the west before he died was touring Israel reading from a new Hebrew translation of his poetry — a

rare honour which had astonished him. Matthews was born in Cincinnati, graduated from Yale and taught English at various universities before settling down at City College in 1933. His work was first published in book form when he was 29, and there can never have been any doubt about his lucidity or his deftness. Equally incontrovertible is that he matured into a greater recklessness and questioning of the older man more open to doubt, alive to calamity.

Looking back, it almost seems as though I could remember but this can't be: how could I bear it? — the future toward which

I'd clutter with that boy tied like a bell around my throat, a brave man and coward both.

to break and break my metronomic heart and just enough to learn to love the blues. (The Blues)

In friendship, Bill shortened the hours with doleful laughter and crackling eloquence; breathlessly smart, he didn't hog the show; his wit welcomed others in. A conversation always teamed with possibilities, whether about Alexander Pope, Coleman Hawkins or a limp salad.

As a translator, he achieves a tone which is both appropriate and contemporary. Matthews married three times; he leaves a partner, Cecilia, and two sons.

Peter Fogwell

William Matthews, poet, born 1942; died November 12, 1997

tal emerges as a rueful, knowing figure who doesn't himself escape mockery. His artistry lies in a sense of artlessness, engaging the deep, human mysteries in a wholly secular voice. So a narrative becomes a moral insight without spelling itself out; a reflection becomes a way of acknowledging feelings without the dead weights of platitudes or innuendo.

"What's it about?" one asked. I didn't know that day, I didn't ask myself until later. It's a rooster on what I love, and whom, and how I manage to hold on to them. (Little Blue Nude)

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Jackdaw



Perfect match?

HAVE you got what it takes to be a football wife? Channel 4 want to make a documentary on your life with your husband. What do you wear when the camera crew turn up?

a) Smart suit, to show who wears the trousers in the relationship.
b) Slacks and a jumper — casual but presentable.
c) Shell-suit bottoms with a pink C&A top. And matching earrings shaped like footballs. How would you describe your home?
a) A small but homely cottage in the Home Counties with a modest amount of land.
b) An elegant townhouse in north London, albeit furnished partly by Ikea.
c) Pink walls, pink ceilings, pink carpets, pink sofa. Pink's a really nice colour, isn't it? Lovely. What do you plan to call your next child?
a) Jocasta.
b) Jane.
c) Kylie. Your husband confesses that he is a serial adulterer with several secret love children. Do you...
a) Throw him out of the house, burn his possessions and begin divorce proceedings?
b) Move in with your mum and suggest some counselling sessions?
c) Say "boys will be boys"? What was your previous occupation in life?
a) Trained barrister.
b) Student.
c) Glamour model. How did you score? Mostly As: Face facts: you're not really cut out for this. Mostly Bs: Work on the perm, get some tighter trousers, hang around the right bars and we could be talking. Mostly Cs: I hear that had

who's just made the West Ham first team is unattached. This week anyway.

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Gas 'marshal' rides cowboys out of town

Spottiswoode targets the dodgy brokers, report Celia Weston and David Gow

COWBOY brokers charging consumers up to £20 to switch to a new gas supplier will be outlawed under new regulations on doorstep-selling launched yesterday.

The ruling will also make it illegal for gas companies to accept any customer who has been forced by high-pressure sales techniques into making a payment to switch supplier.

The outlawing of dodgy doorstep selling practices, coming into effect later this month, will be one of the conditions under which gas companies are licensed to compete in the 18.5 million domestic supply market.

The industry watchdog, Ofgas, developed the marketing licence condition following a vigorous campaign by the Gas Consumers Council (GCC) to protect customers allegedly being fleeced by unscrupulous sales teams or being signed up to new gas suppliers without their knowledge or consent.

Complaints about sharp practices — including agents coming householders in to

signing contracts — began to flood in to the GCC almost as soon as the first consumers in South-west England were given the option in 1996 to switch from former monopoly supplier British Gas.

Clare Spottiswoode, Ofgas director general, said yesterday that tens of thousands of people had been fleeced by agents. "We want to ensure all licensed suppliers are not sanctioning these firms," she said. One brokerage alone, she claimed, had swindled 30,000 people, and at least two had taken money and then declared themselves bankrupt.

The practice, until now legal, was particularly rife in Manchester, Hull and London.

"We are trying to effect to close them down. If we fail, we will want to make sure they get as little money as possible," she added.

Ofgas will now be able to penalise any of the 15 suppliers now licensed to sell gas to domestic customers, for using misleading or improper sales practices.

The suppliers could face fines or enforcement orders

and ultimately lose their licences. "The scale of the fines could be unlimited and certainly large enough to stop misbehaviour," said Ms Spottiswoode.

Companies holding domestic gas supply licences had backed the new measures. Jenny Kirkpatrick, chairman of the GCC, said: "There will be more pitfalls when suppliers pass on to other agencies the responsibility for collecting bad debts."

Sion Brynach of British Gas said complaints about misleading sales techniques were running at 800 a day across Britain. "We had a recent example in Swansea of a widow finding out a supplier had signed up her husband — and he's been dead for four years."

The latest figures show that nearly 850,000 customers have changed supplier, out of a total of 4.5 million consumers able to switch.

British Gas yesterday claimed that 11,000 customers a week are telephoning the company's information line about its competitors' prices. BG Trading, supplier to domestic and commercial customers, made the claim as it launched an advertising campaign about its own prices.



Clare Spottiswoode, Ofgas director general, assures customers in Cardiff that the gas cowboys will lose their licences

PHOTOGRAPH: JEFF MORRAN

Fashion firm that defined 1970s shuts its factories • Sears sale moves ahead • Fraser shares suffer

Laura Ashley grand design in tatters

Julia Finch

SHARES in fashion group Laura Ashley slumped to a record low yesterday as City experts speculated that the company was close to collapse.

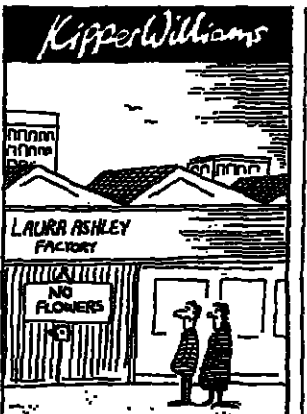
The share price tumbled 20 per cent to 27.5p — compared to a peak of 215p less than two years ago — as the group unveiled another catalogue of disasters.

The retailer admitted to extremely poor Christmas sales, warned that its losses would be far greater than had been expected and announced that it was to sell off all its British manufacturing capacity.

Four factories in Wales — where the Ashley empire was founded in 1963 — and one in the Netherlands are to be sold, in a move that will affect nearly 700 staff.

The sewing operations in Oswestry and Gresford are being closed, as are the fabric and wallpaper printing operations in Newtown and Carmo. They have a book value of £2.5 million.

Two other Laura Ashley factories in Wales were sold



last year. John Taylor, chief executive of the Development Board for Rural Wales, said: "It's an opportunity for the new owners to focus on manufacturing and build on the strengths and skills of the workforce."

Lord Hooson, the Liberal peer and former Laura Ashley chairman, said: "I happen to disagree with some of the decisions taken recently but I think there's a very good future for the factories if they are properly managed."

A company spokesman

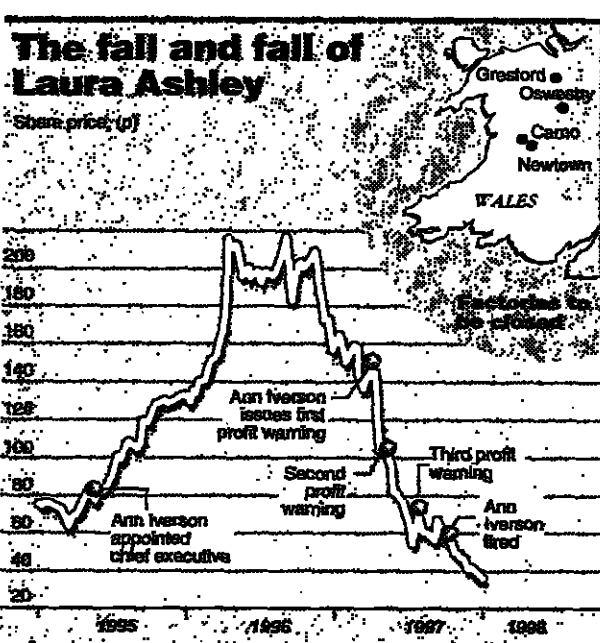
claimed £70 million worth of new loans guaranteed survival at least to spring 1999.

Laura Ashley, whose stock-in-trade was a fashion innovation in the 1970s, has been brought to its knees in little over two years by the ambitious expansion strategy pursued by its former chief executive, Ann Iverson, who departed with a £450,000 pay-off in November.

An American retailer brought in to revitalise the British brand, Ms Iverson changed the company's fashion style and aimed for aggressive expansion in the US.

The Laura Ashley company, which was worth more than £500 million only 18 months ago, now has a stock-market valuation of little more than £50 million. Yesterday said it was going back to its roots, retrenching in the US and shutting down its factories in order to survive.

Slow sales, serious overstocking and a need to improve cash flow forced the company to start its winter sale well ahead of the festive season. But yesterday Laura Ashley revealed that sales were still down 3 per cent in the last 24 weeks — or 8 per



cent including the effect of the strong pound.

US sales have dipped by 13 per cent in seven weeks. The company admitted: "Trading has been particularly difficult in North America."

David Hoare, the management consultant drafted in to dig the company out of its hole, has appointed Michael Appel, a specialist retailing troubleshooter, to its US business. A spokesman said: "His

primary task is to stabilise the business."

The company warned investors that its problems would mean a loss of £33 million-£35 million for the full year — nearly three times the level analysts were expecting only a few months ago and £10 million more than the firm's own brokers were estimating.

The loss does not include restructuring costs. Yesterday the company refused to comment on the scale of these charges, but it is understood they could be in the region of £10 million.

In an attempt to update its trademark fashion look, a new designer has been installed with a brief to "re-invent Laura Ashley".

But City analysts are not convinced that the company can make a comeback. Roy Macdonald of Henderson Crosthwaite said: "They cannot make go of it without major downsizing, and only a liquidator could afford it."

Another analyst said: "There is a brand worth salvaging but the debts are mounting up."

Both questioned whether the banks would stand by the company.

Retailers line up to vent their grief

SEARS yesterday announced a further step in its lengthy restructuring, as it and House of Fraser joined the rash of disappointing Christmas sales reports, writes Roger Coote.

Shares in lingerie chain La Senza fell 2p to 19½p after it warned that losses would be much greater than had been anticipated, after sales growth fell short of its expectations.

House of Fraser said sales over the Christmas period were almost 5 per cent higher than last year, but the period included the start of the January Sales.

The Fraser share price dropped 7 per cent to 203p as analysts saw recovery coming more slowly than they had hoped when new chief executive John Coleman joined in 1996.

Sears, which is pursuing

a break-up after years of disappointing results, reported muted sales over Christmas.

Selfridge has seen a 9 per cent increase during the sale period, compared with pre-Christmas sales growth of less than 3 per cent.

Sears' clothing stores had a mixed Christmas, with Miss Selfridge having the worst time. Sales throughout the division, which includes Adams, Wallis, Richards and Warehouse, were 2.3 per cent higher than last year up to January 10.

The break-up of the group will be completed this year. The cost of the demerger will be £40 million, while the group expects its disposal of the shoe retail empire, which culminates in the sale of Cable in the next two weeks, to come to £150 million.

The Guardian Travel Shop

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Two accused of £1.25bn gold fraud attempt against NatWest

Pauline Springett

CITY of London Police last night claimed to have foiled a fraud attempt involving £2 billion (£1.25 billion) of forged gold certificates. A raid on a

NatWest branch, carried out with the bank's co-operation, resulted in the arrest of four men allegedly attempting to trade the certificates with the bank. The documents indicated that the men had 207,000 kilos of gold on deposit at a Swiss bank.

The four men, who were questioned at Bishopsgate police station, included two businessmen from Worcestershire, an American and a man from Sierra Leone. The Worcestershire businessmen were yesterday released on police bail pending further inquiries.

Last night the police charged the others with "conspiracy to defraud financial institutions by inducing them

to believe forged gold certificates were genuine". They have been remanded in custody to appear before City of London magistrates today.

The arrests followed what the force described as a covert operation by its fraud squad.

Detective Inspector Ken Stewart said: "The excellent assistance we have received in this case shows that by joint co-operation we can effectively combat fraud directed

against financial institutions in the City of London."

This latest alleged fraud is one of the largest to have been attempted in the City. It follows a spate of recent police operations which have smashed fraud rings.

Last autumn, City police foiled a £470 million fraud involving US bonds. And last summer saw the "China bonds" trial, which also involved US securities.

A spokesman for the force said that the number of attempted frauds in the City of London was not on the increase.

"The City is a financial centre. This sort of thing does occur," he said.

A NatWest spokesman said it was the bank's policy to be vigilant and to liaise closely with the police. "We take this sort of thing very seriously indeed," he said.

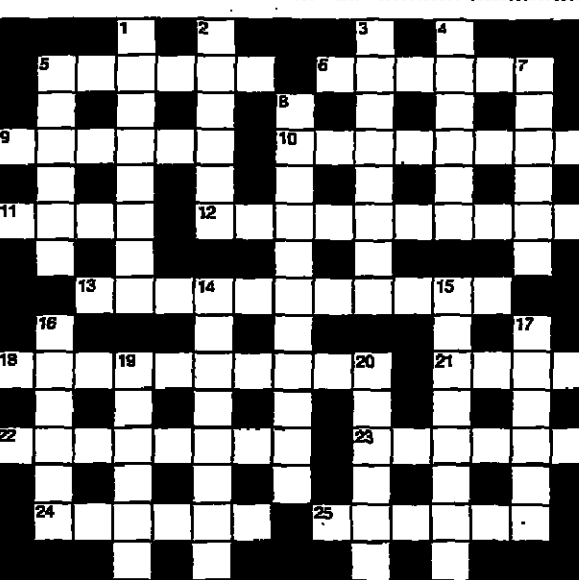
Realise your full potential and enhance your prospects within a dynamic, stimulating environment.

The Observer

Work, the new recruitment section. See Business.

Guardian Crossword No 21,173

Set by Fidelio



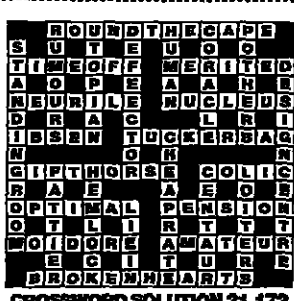
Across
5 Attention seeker's retreat from tombay (6)
6 Lines in solicitor's test (3,3)
9 She being island's first murder victim (6)
10 One not on this side (8)
11 Peter and church students (4)
12 Cure's superior (10)
13 Cricketers face this army

composed of those questioning their loyalty? (11)
16 King compiler used to work at the Guardian (10)
21 Reddhead Virginia, the first (4)
22 Attendant to travel about (8)
23 One's talking for detective fiction writer (6)
24 Supposition regarding

article on gold yitrium (8)
25 She advises, say, one in time (6)

Down

1 Representative somehow climbs round Swinley Bottom (8)
2 Flap created by continental with drink (6)
3 Looking forward to "Things To Come" (8)
4 Old capital and French headgear (6)
5 One-stocking stocking (6)
7 Nurse available for sinew (6)
8 Disturbance at spy base (11)
14 Prime's truer version creates opening (8)
15 These alps have a way beneath them for the opera lover (6)
16 Juliet's cousin Timothy ends East European (6)
17 Izmir is the place where second fancy ran out (6)
19 She says she's inclined (6)
20 Give up the "Ingres version" (6)



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Hub boost at Gatwick as traffic grows

MORE than 103 million passengers used BAA's seven UK airports last year, an increase of 6.7 per cent compared with 1996, writes Keith Harper.

Gatwick — its managing director, Janis Kong is pictured right — established itself as an important international hub by handling 26.8 million passengers, a rise of 11.2 per cent. From noon on Monday air passengers between Heathrow and London will have the opportunity to travel free for a week on BAA's £450 million Heathrow Express. The train will not be fully operable until June, but is running from Paddington station in west London to a dedicated station at Hayes in Middlesex. A coach will take passengers the rest of the way in a journey lasting up to 35 minutes.

From January 26, a £5 fare will be introduced for a one way journey. The trains are purpose built and feature airline-style service and high quality interiors.

PHOTOGRAPH: GRAHAM TURNER



Insurers threaten to ground planes over threat from millennium bug

Airline disaster warning

Keith Harper
Transport Editor

INSURERS warned last night that airlines worldwide would be grounded if they failed to protect their computers from the millennium bug.

Lloyd's insurers said they would withdraw cover for airlines that did not adapt their systems before 2000. The fear is that on-board computer systems could fail or go awry while in flight, leading to a disaster. Avionics could be particularly prone to

the bug, which threatens to confuse computers into thinking that the year 2000 is 1900 or even zero.

A questionnaire will be sent out to all the large airlines, and regulatory authorities by the end of the month. It is being written by the Lloyd's aviation underwriters' association and the aviation insurance officers' association.

The AIOA's chairman, Keith Selby, yesterday said the survey would try to establish whether insured clients would draft an exclusion

clause that would deny cover to insured clients "if their situation was unsatisfactory".

He added: "The key thing is to raise awareness on the whole issue and ask what commitment organisations are putting into resolving year 2000 problems."

The insurance market is aware that many companies are still grappling with the millennium bug problem. Clients will be asked to sign a warranty guaranteeing that their systems will be functioning properly.

London aviation insurers cover regulatory authorities

such as the Civil Aviation Authority and the Federal Aviation Administration based in the United States. These organisations are responsible for air traffic control and their computers will also have to be updated.

Bob Ayling, chief executive of British Airways, said last night it had set aside £100 million to make sure it was prepared. "Nothing is being left to chance. Our customers and staff can be assured that BA will be flying normally on the first day of 2000."

Senior managers from 250 airlines are carrying out an

audit to make sure that there is a smooth transition. Their organisation, the International Air Transport Association, said in Geneva last night that it was confident they would be ready.

But the IATA stressed its role was not to police airlines, but to make sure they had a high level of awareness. Computer simulations were being carried out by individual airlines, suppliers and air traffic management to test systems.

The International Federation of Airline Pilots is holding a series of emergency meetings to discuss the prospect that some airlines may

boycott airports across the world which are thought to be vulnerable to the bug.

Cheryl Gillen, shadow DTI spokesperson, last night accused the Government of inaction over the issue. She said that the ministerial group, chaired by Trade and Industry Secretary, Margaret Beckett, had yet to meet to discuss the matter.

"With less than 500 working days to the millennium, the Government has wasted precious time. It has not got a full grasp of the costs involved," she declared.

EU warns Murdoch over digital TV plans

Julie Wolf in Brussels and
Simon Beavis in London

RUPERT Murdoch's ambitions to lead Britain's digital television revolution were dealt a new blow from Brussels yesterday when the European Commission warned it could block plans for a joint venture between BSkyB — his satellite TV company — and British Telecom.

The new warning provoked speculation last night that the two companies could be forced to rethink the funding of the joint venture in interactive home shopping and banking services and may even be

forced to part company.

It is the second blow for BSkyB in a week after the group was forced to admit that the launch of its digital satellite service would be held up until the summer because of delays in producing set-top box receivers.

Both groups have joined forces to form British Interactive Broadcasting (BIB), each taking a 32.5 per cent stake and have been battling for eight months to win approval from Brussels for the venture.

The banking group HSBC are also shareholders. BIB plans to invest nearly £270 million over five years in infrastructure and to subsidise the cost of set-top boxes needed to decode digital sig-

nals so that they can be sold at a 50 per cent discount of around £200 to subscribers. The venture is furiously trying to sign up retailers and financial services companies to

Egged on by rival UK broadcasters, Brussels has proved stubborn

buy space on its interactive service to further spread the cost of subsidising the service.

An EC official said that the Commission had concerns because of the dominant position BSkyB and BT held in their respective markets and because of the potential for

BSkyB to cross-subsidise its digital pay-TV activities.

The Commission has frequently fired shots across the bows of the two companies and only last month the competition commissioner, Karel Van Miert, went out of his way to highlight specific fears about BSkyB and BT.

BSkyB, in which Mr Murdoch's News Corporation holds a 40 per cent stake, and BT have been battling for nearly two years to get acceptance from regulators in the UK and in Brussels to accept their plans to offer subscribers to digital TV a range of interactive services.

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Safeway banks on new account

Struggling supermarket attempts to trump rivals with market-beating interest rates, reports IAN WYLIE

STRUGGLING supermarket chain Safeway will try to salvage some corporate pride next week when it trumps its rivals with a new market-beating bank account.

The instant access savings account, which will be run by Abbey National, will offer interest rates well in excess of those paid by either Sainsbury or Tesco.

The move will place further pressure on the high street banks and building societies who so far have been unwilling to match supermarket rates.

Safeway has limped lamely behind Sainsbury and Tesco in the race to offer financial services to shoppers. In less than a year, Sainsbury has signed up 600,000 savers to its instant access account, while Tesco has collected 500,000 account-holders in just six months.

Safeway's banking partnership with Abbey National has

been less fruitful. Instead of launching a straightforward savings account, the chain opted last year to launch its ABC Bonus "budgeting" account, designed more to help shoppers pay their bills.

While Sainsbury and Tesco have been paying a flat-rate of 6.5 per cent gross (5.2 per cent net) on balances as low as £1, the Safeway account required monthly deposits of £50 and paid just 5 per cent gross (4 per cent net). The chain refuses to disclose how many shoppers have signed up, but the number is thought to fall far short of Tesco's or Sainsbury's haul.

The new account, however, will pay tiered rates of interest rising from 4 per cent gross (3.2 per cent net) on opening balances of £50 to 7.4 per cent gross (5.92 per cent net) on deposits exceeding £2,500.

But retail analysts say the move is unlikely to reverse the fortunes of Safeway,

which has endured a torrid year of trading. The chain has issued two profit warnings in the last year while Sainsbury and Tesco have powered ahead. Safeway share prices suffered further when merger talks with Asda were aborted, although fresh rumours have been circulating this week that Safeway could be lining up a bid for Somerfield.

Clive Vaughan, research manager at retail consultancy Verdict, said: "Financial services are a marginal business opportunity for supermarkets."

"The name of the supermarket game is getting the food offer right and Safeway

remains too much of a Sainsbury clone."

A spokesman for Tesco said it was unlikely to react to Safeway's new account. "Our main competitors are the traditional providers of financial services such as the high street banks and building societies, not our supermarket rivals," he said.

The Halifax will respond today to the supermarket threat by launching a new high interest savings account, but the offer will appeal only to wealthy savers. Interest rates start at 7.5 per cent gross (5.84 per cent net) but the minimum opening balance is £10,000.

Banks vs supermarkets

% interest rates (gross)

The big banks				The big supermarkets			
Deposit	£500	£1,000	£2,500	Deposit	£500	£1,000	£2,500
Halifax	4.00	4.00	4.15	Sainsbury	6.50	7.20	7.40
Barclays	3.95	3.95	3.95	Safeway's	6.50	6.50	6.50
NetWest	6.50	3.85	3.85	Tesco	6.50	6.50	6.50
Lloyds	3.40	3.40	3.40				

Lloyds reshuffle claims maverick

Julia Finch

ABOARDROOM reshuffle at Lloyds TSB has left a maverick former mortgage boss without a job.

Andrew Longhurst, the maverick former Cheltenham & Gloucester building society chief who engineered the first windfall payouts to savers when he negotiated the £1.8 billion sale of C&G to Lloyds, is to leave the bank in April.

The ambitious mortgage chief is understood to have harboured ambitions to take over the top job at the bank, which has since also swallowed up the TSB.

But he has had an uncomfortable couple of years at Lloyds. At one point he was ditched from the board only to be reinstated later. Now he has been thwarted by a younger man.

Former TSB boss Peter Ellwood, aged 54, was appointed group chief executive last February and has now tight-

ened his grip on the bank with a series of appointments which left Mr Longhurst without a job.

Mr Longhurst, aged 58, had a six-month contract and will receive six-months' pay in compensation. He is understood to have been on a basic salary of £300,000.

Asked if Mr Longhurst had jumped or been pushed out of his job as spokeswoman for Lloyds TSB said: "Neither." She explained that "a review of the bank's structure took large chunks of Andrew Longhurst's portfolio away. There wasn't a role for him any more."

But she said Mr Longhurst had been involved in the restructuring and fully supported it. "He basically reorganised himself out of a job."

Mr Ellwood has appointed Michael Fairley, aged 49, as his new deputy chief executive. The current deputy chief executive, Alan Moore, is to relinquish his executive duties and become deputy chairman, replacing John Davies, who is retiring.

Notebook

Imperial echo in Hong Kong's fate



Edited by
Alex Brummer

THE atmosphere in the bars and cafes of Lan Kwai Fong where Hong Kong's brokers and traders retreat after a hard day's night will have lost a great deal of its sparkle over the past week.

Following the implosion of Peregrine — the star of Asia's investment banking firmament — the rush for the doors has been palpable. Schroders, Britain's last world-class investment bank, is scaling back its Asian operations, cutting 220 of its 1,000 staff in the Asia-Pacific region.

Peregrine, now in liquidation, has already axed 600 or 700 people. NatWest Markets has sacked 42 of its Asian analysts as it prepares to sell the rest of its business in the region — a step already taken by Barclays.

Thus within six months of the British withdrawal from the territory, some of the factors which made it so attractive as a financial centre are melting away. In many ways, this loss of financially skilled people is as serious for Hong Kong's future as the actual fall in the Hang Seng index itself.

The "one country, two systems" concept under which China reclaimed Hong Kong was partly about the special network of legal, financial and banking skills which Hong Kong had to offer.

That is rapidly being dissipated. With each business setback in the erstwhile colony, the new, non-elected regime hangs on to the dollar link to the Hong Kong currency in the belief that it will be better if nothing is changed.

The possibility of a proper democratic debate on the issue, which would have included some elements of the business community, vanished along with the elected Legislative Council.

The Asian scare is proving to be one of those seminal events, as with the Latin American debt crisis of 1992, which seems likely to reshape perceptions. The credit agencies are busy reconsidering the ratings attached to major European banks, including those of Germany and France, as a result of their exposure to Asia.

Some brave investors could possibly see the current situation as a buying opportunity. But as those involved in Latin America would testify, it may be a decade or more before the losses taken in the crisis start to be recouped.

Ashley exit

IT MIGHT have been kinder for Laura Ashley not to have survived the 1980s. It seems increasingly likely, after the latest grim disclosures, that it will not survive

the 1990s. The pain would at least have been over more swiftly if the company had suffered a similar fate to other 1980s niche retailers such as Sock Shop.

This decade has certainly not been kind to the company which seemed to have a golden future when it came to the stock market in 1985. Its highest ever profits (£23 million) came in its third year as a quoted company; the losses starting with the new decade. Employment has steadily shrunk from nearly 8,000 in 1990 to barely half that, even before it was announced that the factories are to be cast adrift.

The best hope for the stores must be a takeover by a retailer with deep pockets and skills to make something of the brand, which clearly still has value and an international appeal. The buyer would have to be brave, however, and the price would have to be low.

In the absence of such a saviour, Laura Ashley will have to try and become an international designer label, competing with the likes of Burberry, DKNY or Austin Reed. That will mean hefty retrenchment, and a hefty cost of closing or disposing of hundreds of stores.

Lloyds remake

THE clear-out in the Lloyds TSB boardroom is part of the process of cementing the Peter Ellwood era as chief executive.

The most significant change is the departure of Andrew Longhurst, who came to Lloyds via the Cheltenham & Gloucester purchase. He was once seen as a potential successor to former chief executive Sir Brian Pittman, who is now chairman. Mr Longhurst was something of a pioneer in the building societies movement, running the most efficient and respected society and being notoriously well paid for the job.

In many ways, the break-up of the building society movement as it used to be was his doing. When the C&G bolted to Lloyds TSB in 1992, Mr Longhurst signalled a new way forward for building societies which has led to mass defections, led by the Halifax, Alliance & Leicester, and Woolwich.

In the view of many of those involved in the financial services industry, the process of demutualisation and consolidation is far from over. It seems likely that while the affable Mr Longhurst may have found himself surplus at Lloyds TSB, he will be useful non-executive chairman fodder for other financial services outfits.

The new person to watch at Lloyds TSB will clearly be Michael Fairley, brought in from Barclays in 1991, who as deputy chief executive will be responsible, along with new retailing banking director Gordon Pell, for consumer banking where Lloyds TSB is widely seen to be Britain's most effective operation. The appointments signify the firm's increasing clarity of focus after old fashioned clearer financial services titan.

Rolls customer buy-out team inundated with help offers

BUYING the Rolls-Royce luxury car business is proving more of a struggle than the 10 enthusiasts behind the owners' action committee anticipated, writes Nicholas Barnister.

The problem, they claim, is not so much raising the money — they are seeking £680 million — but dealing with the flood of offers of help and media attention.

Michael Shrimpton, the barrister heading the Rolls-Royce Action Committee, said: "I've hardly had any food or sleep since we announced our bid plans last Wednesday."

Along with the demands to appear on Dutch, German and Canadian television have come offers of help, including the use of a castle and a plane for committee members.

Mr Shrimpton, a Bentley owner, has been lent a

Rolls-Royce Phantom Six together with chauffeur. Among its lesser tasks was to ferry Mr Shrimpton's neighbour down to the local McDonald's to get him a quick meal. The more serious problem facing the owners' committee has been getting professional advisers on board.

"The first priority is to appoint a merchant bank because only they can receive the memorandum of sale," Mr Shrimpton said. "Our business plans cannot be finalised until the bank is appointed."

But the action committee has found that many leading merchant banks have already been signed up by its rivals in the race for Rolls, including Germany's BMW, Volkswagen, and Daimler-Benz, Japan's Toyota, Italy's Fiat, and the Ford of the US.

TOURIST RATES — BANK SELLS

Australia 2.44	France 9.69	Italy 2.55B	Singapore 2.82
Austria 20.28	Germany 2.89	Malta 0.63	South Africa 7.87
Belgium 59.48	Greece 457.35	Netherlands 3.23	Spain 243.05
Canada 2.25	Hong Kong 12.28	New Zealand 12.74	Sweden 12.78
Cyprus 0.847	India 65.50	Norway 11.93	Switzerland 1.54
Denmark 11.05	Ireland 1.154	Portugal 254.78	Turkey 333.500
Finland 5.81	Israel 5.84	Saudi Arabia 0.01	USA 1.593

Supplied by NatWest Bank (excluding Indian rupee and Israeli shekel).

مكتبة العصر